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General Assembly
Fifty-first Session

Official Records

68th plenary meeting
Friday, 29 November 1996, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Razali Ismail ..... (Malaysia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 8 *(continued)*

Adoption of the agenda and organization of work: reports of the General Committee

Third report of the General Committee (A/51/250/Add.2)

The President: This afternoon I wish to draw the attention of representatives to the third report of the General Committee, concerning a request by a number of delegations for the inclusion in the agenda of an additional item entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the International Organization for Migration", as well as a request by a number of delegations for the inclusion in the agenda of an additional item entitled "Proclamation of 7 December as International Civil Aviation Day".

In paragraph 1 of the report, the General Committee recommends to the General Assembly that an item entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the International Organization for Migration" be included in the agenda of the current session.

May I take it that the General Assembly decides to include in the agenda of the current session this additional item?

It was so decided.

The President: The General Committee further decided to recommend to the General Assembly that the additional item be considered directly in plenary meeting.

May I take it that the General Assembly decides to consider this item directly in plenary meeting?

It was so decided.

The President: In paragraph 2 of the report, the General Committee recommends to the General Assembly that an item entitled "Proclamation of 7 December as International Civil Aviation Day" be included in the agenda of the current session.

May I take it that the General Assembly decides to include in the agenda of the current session this additional item?

It was so decided.

The President: The General Committee further decided to recommend to the General Assembly that the additional item be considered directly in plenary meeting.

May I take it that the General Assembly decides to consider this item directly in plenary meeting?

It was so decided.

96-86950 (E)

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

Agenda item 35

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/51/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/51/678)

Draft resolutions (A/51/L.33, L.34, L.35, L.36)

The President: I call first on His Excellency Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Ka (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*interpretation from French*): I have the honour, as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to address the General Assembly on the item entitled "Question of Palestine". It also gives me pleasure to convey to you, Sir, the congratulations of our Committee on your election to the presidency of the Assembly. I am convinced that your experience, your in-depth knowledge of this subject and the interest you have shown in the question of Palestine for so long will contribute to the success of our discussions on this item.

Need I recall that as of next April the question of Palestine will have been on the Assembly's agenda for 50 years. The map of the world has changed considerably since 1947, with many new States coming into being and the history of our Organization becoming closely intertwined with the question of Palestine. Today it is hard to believe that half a century later we have still not managed to find a solution to this question.

The start of the Middle East peace process in Madrid, in October 1991, offered the peoples of the region a glimmer of hope. Since then, considerable progress and important groundwork have been accomplished in the negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. But we must acknowledge today that the fate of the peace process begun five years ago continues to be of concern, as was reflected in the statements of many speakers during the general debate. While we have heard statements in support of the peace process, concerns have also been expressed with regard to the viability of the process. We are all pleased when the peace process progresses normally, in keeping with the agreed timetable and principles; but we are all concerned when the implementation of the accords is slowed down or runs into obstacles.

Allow me to review briefly the developments of the past 12 months in the evolution of the situation and of the relations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and the effects of these developments on the Palestinian people. The Committee welcomed the Israeli Government's withdrawal of its forces from six Palestinian towns in the West Bank and from more than 450 villages, and its transfer to the Palestinian Authority of its powers and responsibilities in civil administration and security. The historic election of 20 January 1996 made it possible for the first time to democratically elect the members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and the President of the Palestinian National Authority. Mr. Yasser Arafat was elected President of the Executive Authority of the Palestinian Council.

In April the Palestinian National Council voted to repeal articles of the Palestine National Charter that ran counter to the agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. That was the first time the National Council had met in Gaza. In May, we witnessed the start of negotiations on permanent status. We also welcomed with satisfaction the first meeting between Mr. Arafat and the new Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, which took place on 4 September. All these events, which are of crucial importance for the Palestinian people and for the Israelis and their Arab neighbours, were welcomed because they created a political climate conducive to the continuation of the peace process.

But as the Assembly knows, conditions on the ground during most of last year were far from favourable. Over the last 12 months our Committee has continued, in accordance with the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly, to monitor the situation from the point of view of the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, and the Committee has taken note of serious failures by Israel to respect the commitments it undertook as a party to the agreements and its obligations as an occupying Power, by virtue of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

As regards its commitments, Israel's withdrawal of its troops from Hebron, planned for the month of March, did not take place as agreed due to the Israeli elections. And once the elections were completed, the troops were still not withdrawn. The question was then the subject of

new discussions between the Israelis and the Palestinian Authority following the Middle East Summit, held in Washington in October. Nor did the withdrawal from zone B of the West Bank begin, as planned, in September 1996.

Aside from these flagrant violations of the bilateral agreements, the Israeli authorities have taken steps that have had serious repercussions on the livelihoods and living conditions of the Palestinian people. The systematic cutting off, in February, of zones placed under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority led to the fragmentation of Palestinian communities, isolating them from each other and from the rest of the world. This collective punishment led to a serious crisis: the Palestinians have seen themselves virtually deprived of the right to travel in order to work, study, transact business, buy supplies, worship or seek medical treatment.

Our Committee also deemed unacceptable the interference by Israeli authorities with the activities of the members of the Palestinian Council who represent the Jerusalem district.

The Committee was very concerned by the statements and measures of the new Israeli Government regarding settlements. The confiscation of Palestinian lands and the building of settlements have continued, and plans for the construction of new settlements have already been presented. At the beginning of this month, a high-ranking member of the Cabinet of the Israeli Prime Minister spoke of a "declaration of intent" in referring to plans recently drawn up by the Minister of Housing and Public Works to construct approximately 2,000 dwellings in a new settlement to the north of Ramallah. Such declarations are clearly harmful, for they compromise — and perhaps even nullify — efforts aimed at establishing a climate of trust between the parties. The tendency towards continued expansion of settlements remains quite worrisome in that it translates into a continued increase in the number of settlers.

The Committee also noted that the presence of armed Israeli settlers, placed near fairly well-populated Palestinian communities, created a climate of insecurity and tension that often led to acts of violence and intimidation against the Palestinian population.

The Committee sought to remind the Israeli Government that the construction of new settlements or the expansion of existing settlements constitutes a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and of the bilateral agreements, according to which there should be no violation of the integrity of the West Bank or of the Gaza Strip, the status of which must remain unchanged during the transitional period, until the completion of negotiations on permanent status.

The international community expressed deep indignation when the Israeli authorities recently decided to open access to the archaeological tunnel in the vicinity of the Haram al-Sharif, in occupied East Jerusalem. This measure provoked riots in the course of which more than 50 Palestinian civilians were killed and a number of others injured. There were also casualties among the Palestinian police forces and the Israeli armed forces. The Security Council met on an urgent basis following these tragic events. At that historic meeting of the Council, 50 speakers, most of them Ministers for Foreign Affairs, denounced the Israeli measures. At the end of the debate, the Council adopted resolution 1073 (1996), in which it called for the immediate cessation and reversal of all acts that had resulted in the aggravation of the situation and had had negative implications for the Middle East peace process. The Council called, in particular, for a restoration of the situation prior to these acts; for the safety and protection of the Palestinian civilians to be ensured; for the immediate resumption of negotiations within the Middle East peace process; and for the timely implementation of the agreements reached.

Our Committee welcomed the subsequent efforts by the United States, as a co-sponsor of the peace process, to prevent the situation from degenerating and to achieve a resumption of the negotiations on permanent status, which had been suspended since May. The negotiations began again only after the Middle East Summit in Washington. After the Summit, the Committee expressed the hope that the parties would be able to overcome the existing difficulties and to move on to substantive consideration of issues relating to permanent status.

These developments have confirmed the Committee's view that the international community should, now more than ever, closely monitor the overall situation at this crucial moment when the Palestinian people is going through a delicate transitional phase that should lead to self-determination and the creation of an independent state.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has always taken the position that a fair, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine must be based on the following: Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and

338 (1973); the withdrawal of Israeli forces from all Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem; respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized boundaries; and the recognition and exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and to an independent state.

The Committee also takes the view that respect for these fundamental principles by States both within the region and outside of the region could help in the search for global and lasting solutions to the question of Palestine and to the other problems of the region.

In keeping with its mandate, the Committee has continued to contribute to international endeavours to promote the implementation of the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, of subsequent implementation agreements — in particular the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip — and has continued to mobilize the support of the international community for all forms of assistance to the Palestinian people during the transitional period. Allow me, on behalf of the Committee, to once again thank all the States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations that have lent the Committee their support and have made it possible for a number of events to take place under its auspices, events which they have hosted or in which they have participated.

In 1996 the Committée organized a series of future-oriented meetings: a seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people, held in Cairo; a symposium for non-governmental organizations in the North American region, held in New York; and a symposium for European non-governmental organizations and an international meeting of non-governmental organizations, held in Geneva. Israeli and Palestinian personalities, experts from various countries, representatives of donor countries, representatives of governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as of organizations and entities of the United Nations system, took an active part in these events. They demonstrated once again that the Committee is able to make a very useful contribution by providing a forum for free-ranging and constructive debate on various aspects of the question of Palestine, thereby enabling all who wish to contribute to the success of the efforts currently under way to promote peace to exchange ideas and share their experiences.

The Committee has continued to underscore the critical role of socio-economic development for the Palestinian people, without which no action to promote peace can be successful. We have expressed the hope that the donor community will do its utmost in this regard and honour its commitments. We have also welcomed the economic initiative for the Middle East and North Africa, which we view as a multilateral mechanism that can promote and speed up the creation of a new economic environment in the region as a whole.

The Committee has taken note of the work done by the Department of Public Information over the past year. Two meetings were held during that period between officers of the Committee and the staff of the Department. At those meetings it was agreed that more regular consultations between the Committee and the Department could help to identify the most effective way to use existing resources to implement all aspects of the special information programme directed towards the Palestinian people.

Following discussions with the Department of Public Information, the Committee welcomes the assurance that a process to implement the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly will be initiated, in consultation with Committee officers and the Department, especially in the preparation of the future annual information programme.

The Committee would like to stress the extent to which the Palestinian people value the fact that the United Nations is continuing to address the question of Palestine at this crucial stage. The Assembly has repeatedly reaffirmed that the United Nations has a lasting responsibility vis-à-vis the question of Palestine. It must assume that responsibility and continue to exercise it until the question is settled in all its aspects in a satisfactory manner and with respect for international law. In addition, the Committee believes that the international community cannot remain passive when confronted with the crises in the bilateral negotiating process and that it is politically and morally bound to assist the parties to overcome the obstacles that still threaten the peace process.

Pursuant to the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly, the Committee will continue to monitor the situation closely with regard to that people's right to exercise its inalienable rights. We shall continue to adapt the Committee's programme of work to reflect the situation on the ground and to make a positive contribution to the efforts of the international community

to find a peaceful solution to the question of Palestine on the basis of the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

We hope that we shall always be able to rely on the assistance and support of many Member States in this important task. I invite States that support the objectives and activities of our Committee but that have not yet participated in its work as members or observers to do so, as has South Africa, which has just become a part of the Committee as an observer. The presence and contribution of these new members in the new context of the Middle East peace process will assist the Committee to discharge the important mandate entrusted to it. They will thereby make an important and useful contribution to the efforts of the United Nations and the General Assembly to promote peace and security in the Middle East.

The President: I now call upon Mr. Joseph Cassar of Malta, Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce the Committee's report.

Mr. Cassar (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People: It is a pleasure for me, in my capacity as Rapporteur, to present to the General Assembly the report (A/51/35) of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People covering its work in 1996.

During the past year, the Committee has carried out its work on the basis of its mandate as determined by the resolutions of the General Assembly. The report covers important developments concerning the question of Palestine, the peace process and the activities of the Committee during the past year.

The introduction to the report is contained in chapter I, which indicates briefly the Committee's objectives and perspectives during the year. Chapters II and III are procedural and summarize the respective mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information (DPI) and give information on the Committee's programme of work. Chapter IV reviews the situation relating to the question of Palestine.

The Committee was encouraged that the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations have proceeded in spite of repeated delays and acts of violence, which have caused many innocent victims on both sides and aroused the concern and condemnation of the international community. While noting a number of positive achievements in the peace process earlier in the year, the Committee has expressed grave concern at the exacerbation of the situation on the ground as a result of the continued closure of the territories and delays in the implementation of the agreements, as well as because of policy decisions of the new Israeli Government concerning Jerusalem, settlements and the next stage of the negotiations. It is particularly disappointing that, despite the efforts made by all concerned, there has been no agreement thus far on the redeployment of Israeli troops from Hebron.

The Committee noted that the situation in the areas still under Israeli occupation gave reason for concern and continued to create facts on the ground that had potential negative effects for the future exercise of Palestinian rights and the peace process. The Committee also voiced its concern at the continued problems relative to the living conditions of Palestinians, in particular in the Gaza Strip.

Chapter V gives an account of the various actions taken by the Committee in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 50/84 A and B. This includes, in particular, a letter by the Committee Chairman to the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly regarding the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory following Israel's decision to open a new entrance to the archaeological tunnel in East Jerusalem; action taken within the Security Council on that issue, as well as on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory earlier in the year concerning the closure of the Palestinian territory by Israel; attendance at international conferences and meetings at which the Committee was represented by its Chairman because of their particular relevance to its work; and a list of statements, resolutions and communiques relating to the question of Palestine adopted by United Nations bodies, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and other intergovernmental organizations.

This chapter also contains an account of the action taken by the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights, providing an overview of the various adjustments introduced by the Committee in its programme of work in order to make it more useful and cost-effective.

This chapter also gives a brief account of the seminars and symposia of non-governmental organizations that took place in 1996, namely: a meeting of consultations between the representatives of non-governmental organization coordinating committees and

the Bureau of the Committee; a seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people held in Cairo, Egypt; a North American non-governmental organization symposium held at New York; and a combined European symposium and international meeting held at Geneva. It also includes an account of the Committee's efforts to convene that meeting in Gaza. Further details on these events are contained in annexes II and III to the report.

This chapter also describes the activities of the Division for Palestinian Rights in the field of research, monitoring and publications, as well as the work done by the Division to expand the United Nations computer-based information system on the question of Palestine (UNISPAL), and describes the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Chapter VI covers the work of the Department of Public Information in accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/84 C, including the publications, audio-visual material and other activities of the Department. The chapter contains a number of comments with regard to the state of implementation of this mandate and underlines the importance of completing the Department's whole programme during the current biennium.

The seventh and last chapter contains the recommendations of the Committee. The Committee expresses concern over the future of the peace process in the light of the renewed cycle of violence in the area, delays in the implementation of the agreements reached, the prolonged closure of the occupied Palestinian territory and the resumption of the policy of settlements by the Israeli Government.

The Committee also expresses the belief that there is no alternative to negotiations by the parties concerned on the basis of the peace process and that the international community should intensify its efforts towards the effective implementation of the agreements reached, as well as the resumption of all aspects of the negotiations on the agreed basis.

The Committee reaffirms that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached, and that its own role continues to be useful and necessary during the transitional period and until a satisfactory final settlement is achieved.

The Committee also reaffirms that such a settlement must be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973); the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and other Arab territories occupied since 1967; the principle of exchange of land for peace; and the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, in particular the right to self-determination. The Committee also insists that, during the interim period, Israel must recognize and respect its obligations as the occupying Power under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The Committee calls in particular for an end to the policy and practice of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, which is in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, prejudges the final status negotiations by creating facts on the ground and is therefore contrary to the letter and the spirit of the agreements between the parties, and poses a grave threat to the future of the peace process.

The Committee expresses its concern over the tragic clashes between Palestinians and Israelis in September 1996 and reaffirms the particular status of Jerusalem in accordance with several United Nations resolutions. The Committee recalls that the Security Council has repeatedly affirmed that all measures altering the geographic, demographic and historical character and status of the Holy City are null and void and must be rescinded.

The Committee restates its continued flexibility in its approach and programme of work, while maintaining its position of principle in order to make a concrete contribution, and calls on the General Assembly to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

The Committee expresses its great appreciation to those States that have supported its work and facilitated the organization of events held under the Committee's auspices and calls once again for a broadening of its membership to include countries that support its objectives but have not hitherto participated in its work. In this respect, the Committee welcomes the decision of the Government of South Africa to participate in the work of the Committee as an observer.

The Committee stresses the usefulness of its programme of seminars in the different regions in informing and mobilizing public opinion and promoting an exchange of experience and expertise, and states its intention to continue to organize annually a seminar devoted to the economic and social challenges facing the Palestinians during the transitional period. The

Committee stresses the importance of intensified efforts by non-governmental organizations to organize and coordinate sustained campaigns to inform public opinion and to promote national and international action in support of United Nations resolutions and the Committee's objectives. Noting the continued desire of non-governmental organizations to hold a future meeting in the area under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority, the Committee reiterates its call to the Government of Israel not to interfere negatively in this endeavour as an important confidence-building measure.

The Committee emphasizes the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat and has requested it to continue its programme of studies and publications, and to develop further UNISPAL, the computer-based information system on the question of Palestine, by including all relevant documentation.

The Committee notes the successful introduction in the Division for Palestinian Rights of a pilot project for the training of staff of the Palestinian Authority in the workings of the United Nations system, and requests it to continue this exercise in the future.

In conclusion, the Committee expresses its intention to continue to strive to achieve maximum effectiveness in the implementation of its mandate and to adjust its programme in the light of developments in order to continue to contribute, to the extent possible, to the realization of the common United Nations objective of achieving a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

The President: The next speaker is the Head of the Observer delegation of Palestine, Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi. I call on him in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974 and 43/177 of 15 December 1988.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine) *(interpretation from Arabic)*: Allow me first to extend to you, Sir, my sincere congratulations on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-first session. I am convinced that your wisdom, as well as your long-standing experience and skills, will enable you to preside over the session with great ability. I should also like to pay special tribute to the friendly nation of Malaysia for its genuine and historical relationship with our country, Palestine, as it has always supported our just cause and the struggle of the Palestinian people to realize its inalienable rights. Your country, Sir, has also played a distinguished role in defending our cause in the Security Council and in other United Nations forums.

Allow me also at this time to thank your predecessor, Ambassador Diogo Freitas do Amaral, who presided over the fiftieth session with great skill and ability. I should also like to address special thanks on this occasion to the Chairman and the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their arduous and persistent efforts in serving and promoting the Palestinian cause. I also wish to express our deep appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, for his efforts to promote international peace and security and for his concern for the efficiency and high-quality performance of the different institutions of the United Nations.

The question of Palestine and the Middle East peace process continue to preoccupy the United Nations and its Member States. National and international institutions, as well as governmental and non-governmental organizations, continue to debate the question, mainly with the aim of promoting peace and preserving the international will that led to the convening of the Madrid Peace Conference and brought the parties to the long-standing conflict to the negotiating table.

However, we are now witnessing the dwindling of the dynamics of peace and a standstill in the political negotiations within the context of the Middle East peace process, which faces a number of obstacles that have attracted the attention of the world community, particularly since the deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and the resumption of the cycle of violence, rather than peaceful political negotiations as a means of interaction.

Those recent and sudden developments, which were touched off by Israel as result of opening a tunnel dug alongside the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, forced the Arab Group, at the beginning of this session of the General Assembly, to call for the convening of an urgent meeting of the Security Council to consider the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. Several Ministers of Foreign Affairs who participated in those deliberations expressed their concern and dissatisfaction over the Israeli policies and the repressive measures which led to the explosive situation that resulted in a large number of casualties among the Palestinian population. Hundreds were martyred and the upsurge of a new Palestinian *intifadah* as a natural

response to Israeli provocative measures against the Palestinian people, especially in the Holy City of Jerusalem, was expected. The Security Council responded by adopting resolution 1073 (1996).

The policy of the new Israeli Government under the premiership of Mr. Netanyahu is responsible for the faltering of the Middle East peace process. The coming to power of the coalition of the right-wing Likud with other extreme forces a few months ago led to the application of their declared programme, which aims at increasing Jewish immigration, consolidating, expanding, developing and increasing the number of settlements, and imposing land seizures and forceful expropriation. At the same time, it ignores the principle of the exchange of "land for peace", which is the cornerstone of the peace process, as reaffirmed in the United States peace initiative of 1991.

The present Israeli Government has also expressed its opposition to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State and to the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people. Furthermore, it has consistently reiterated its stand on the need to maintain its occupation of areas in Hebron and Nablus and vital water resources, which constitute the greater part of the occupied Palestinian territory since 1967. Israel also refuses to discuss the question of the Holy City of Jerusalem, and considers it as non-negotiable. Under the pretence that they constitute a vital part of Israel's territorial security, Mr. Netanyahu has also declared his intention of keeping the Syrian Golan Heights under Israeli jurisdiction and of controlling its water resources. The Israeli Prime Minister has adopted the slogan "peace for peace" and refuses the return to the pre-4 June 1967 borders.

The Israeli Government attempts to gain time by semantic manoeuvring with words and by emphasizing futile details in agreed-upon clauses contained in the agreements reached which it wishes to annul or alter. The endless bickering we are witnessing today over the redeployment of Israeli forces from Hebron is ample proof of Israel's policy of non-compliance with agreements reached between the Palestinian Authority and the previous Israeli Government.

Mr. Nsanze (Burundi), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. Netanyahu's Government insists on the necessity of keeping the city divided between a Palestinian population of 120,000 people and only 400 Israeli settlers, brought by the Israeli authorities to allow them to use the excuse of protecting them as a means of prolonging the stay of Israeli forces in the city. This so-called "security" excuse has been used constantly to perpetuate the hold of the Israeli authorities over Palestinian cities, even after the redeployment of Israeli military forces around the cities has taken place. Moreover, Israel has persisted in the imposition of a severe siege on the occupied Palestinian territories since February 1996, which includes the isolation of the city of Jerusalem from the rest of the Palestinian Arab territories. It decided to resume settlement activities and to expand the existing settlements as well as to continue the confiscation and usurpation of land. Further, Israel insists on aggravating the situation by creating obstacles and imposing restrictions on the flow of foreign aid from donor countries to the Palestinian Authority.

The Israeli Government has refused until this day to allow for the return of displaced persons who were forced — I repeat, forced — to leave the occupied Palestinian territory following the June 1967 war. This is despite the fact that the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements calls for the establishment of a quadrilateral committee composed of Palestine, Jordan, Egypt and Israel to organize the return of those displaced persons, who number no fewer than 750,000 Palestinians now living in neighbouring countries. It has also rejected the return of the Palestinian refugees who were driven from their homeland in 1948, and has called for their resettlement and integration into their present countries of residence. Today, the number of Palestinian refugees has reached some three and a half million. Let me recall here that General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948 justly calls for their right of return and compensation, in accordance with the principles of human rights and international law.

The Arab side has expressed a genuine desire in favour of the peace process. Some countries even normalized their relations with Israel, and were visited by both Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres. However, the present Israeli Government has closed the door on such international and regional efforts, thus giving way to a growing scepticism among Arab countries, some of which have resorted to the interruption of the process of normalization, at the same time questioning all that had been achieved in terms of confidence-building measures with Israel. The convening of the Arab Summit Conference in Cairo in June 1996 served as a signal to the world that the peace process was being thwarted and was in danger of extinction because of Israel's intransigent position, which seems to seek to return to square one and to ignore the achievements of the peace

process. Israel explicitly refuses to accept the clear basis on which the Madrid Peace Conference was convened, namely Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), which all call for the withdrawal of Israel from the Arab territories. Israel also attempts to change that basis and to take measures that would indeed torpedo the peace process and plunge the entire Middle East region into a new, vicious cycle of violence and chaos.

The most dangerous of such Israeli policies and measures are those related to the resumption of settlements, the confiscation of land, the siege of Palestinian towns, the repression of the Palestinian people, the prohibition of trade with surrounding Arab countries and the importation of food, and erecting obstacles to the channelling of foreign aid. The Israeli Government has also been launching direct and indirect threats against Syria and Lebanon in its official statements, while at the same time refusing to resume negotiations with them on the basis of what had been achieved between Syria and Lebanon with the previous Israeli Government. The plan called "Lebanon First" is nothing but an Israeli ploy and a fake scenario meant only for media consumption.

The results of the Israeli elections were contrary to what many were expecting. It was widely assumed in international circles that the assassination of the late Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin, would push the Israelis to support the Labour party, which participated with the Arabs in the peace process. The victory of the Right gave rise to concerns in international public opinion that Israel might head towards extremism in spite of its many years of engagement in the peace process. The actual events reflected precisely that, and compelled the European Union and its Parliament and Governments to express their concern over the setbacks in the peace process and their fears with regard to its eventual interruption as a result of the aggravation of the situation and the resurgence of violence. Furthermore, President Clinton, appreciating the gravity of the situation, invited President Arafat and Prime Minister Netanyahu to Washington in order to search for ways to stop the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory and to urge Israel to pursue negotiations in earnest.

Prior to that, the Security Council considered the events and called upon Israel for

> "the immediate cessation and reversal of all acts which have resulted in the aggravation of the situation, and which have negative implications for the Middle East peace process". (*resolution 1073 (1996), para. 1*)

It also called for

> "the safety and protection of Palestinian civilians to be ensured" (*ibid., para. 2*)

as well as for the

> "immediate resumption of negotiations within the Middle East peace process on its agreed basis and the timely implementation of the agreements reached". (*ibid., para. 3*)

Israel has refused to comply with this resolution just as it has done with previous United Nations resolutions.

A mood of optimism had begun to pervade the international community with the convening of the Madrid Peace Conference. The most optimistic were the Palestinian people themselves, who hoped that their suffering would end and that they could return to normal life and stability in their own cities and villages in an independent Palestinian state, after having lived through half a century of dispersal and alienation.

As an expression of its good intentions, the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization complied with all the required measures for confidence-building with a view to creating a favourable environment for developing conditions ripe for peaceful coexistence between Palestinians and Israelis. It was hoped that the way would be paved for a growing optimism through the possibility of achieving promising end results through negotiations.

Unfortunately, the new Israeli Government has not reciprocated, but has even acted arrogantly and in flagrant contradiction to these moves. It has lagged behind and has wavered in the execution of its commitments, has postponed the fulfilment of most of the provisions agreed upon — such as the release of Palestinian prisoners, who now number about 4,500 — and has restricted the freedom of movement of Palestinian citizens within the Palestinian territory. It still controls the entry and exit of Palestinians to and from the Palestinian territory, continues to prohibit the free passage of imports and exports and poses obstacles to the channelling of foreign aid. It has also procrastinated with regard to the redeployment of Israeli forces from other areas and has imposed a harsh siege on Palestinian

territories since February 1996, causing great damage to the Palestinian economy.

Moreover, Israel has refused to hand over powers to the Palestinian Authority in the areas of water resources, electricity and telecommunications. It insists on maintaining the real authority — and even sovereignty — over the land and natural resources. Thus, the current Israeli Government has in point of fact blocked the advance of the peace process. Indeed, it has been working deliberately to pull back from the achievements made over many years.

We had hoped that during this period of time the United States of America would redouble its efforts to invigorate the peace process and use its influence on the Israeli Government in this regard. But it seems that the United States administration was engaged in other issues, and this encouraged Israel to adopt intransigent positions, flouting the will of the international community to establish a just, comprehensive and permanent peace in the Middle East.

Thus, we view the revitalization of the role of the Russian Federation and the effective participation by the European Union, as well as the constant and important role played by the United Nations, including the Security Council, as crucial and complementary elements for the reinvigoration of the peace process and its preservation from complete fossilization and failure. There is no doubt that all such efforts will help the United States of America in influencing Israel and in saving the peace process.

The question of Palestine remains the crux of the Arab-Israeli conflict. A genuine and comprehensive peace cannot be achieved without putting an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab land and without the return of the Palestinian refugees to their homes, the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable right to self-determination, and the right to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with the Holy City of Jerusalem as its capital.

The implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions in this domain remains part of the Organization's continuing responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine, its land and people. The role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and its direct responsibility for the welfare of the Palestinian refugees should be maintained until a permanent solution to their situation is reached.

The question of Palestine cannot be resolved simply through the redeployment of Israeli forces, but only through complete withdrawal of the occupation forces from all the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem; through the dismantling of the Israeli settlements, which have been declared illegal by the international community, as is evident in Security Council Resolutions 465 (1980) and 478 (1980); and through the exercise by the Palestinian people of their right to sovereignty over their land and natural resources.

The refusal of Israel to join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons serves as further proof of its aggressive intentions. Despite its possession of many weapons of mass destruction, it persists in using the excuse of the threat to its security as the basis for its refusal to withdraw from all occupied Arab territories — Palestine, the Syrian Golan Heights and southern Lebanon. Moreover, Israel has been expressing its intention to annex parts of these territories and to place them under its own jurisdiction.

An adequate balance of forces and interests is a necessary factor for the establishment of a just, comprehensive and permanent peace in the Middle East. The acknowledgment by the United States of America of the need for such a balance through equal dealing with all the parties and the use of a single standard is the path to political stability.

This should also entail putting an end to the embargo imposed on the brotherly Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, and the ending of the heavy suffering imposed on the brotherly people of Iraq, as well as the preservation of the territorial integrity of Iraq and non-intervention in its internal affairs.

The opportunity seems ripe at this historic juncture for the pursuit and development of peace and the preservation of security and stability in the Middle East through the achievement of a just solution to the question of Palestine and adherence to the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principles of its Charter. If this opportunity is not seized, we sincerely feel that the whole Middle East region will plunge into another era of tension, instability and chaos for a long period to come.

Mr. Wang Xuexian (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): The Middle East peace process has experienced difficulties and setbacks since the beginning of this year. This has been marked by the failure to implement fully the agreements reached between Palestine and Israel and

even by serious bloodshed between the two sides. The ray of hope for peace in the Middle East region has suddenly turned into dark clouds. Although talks have are been now resumed, the two sides have been slow to reach agreement on some major issues. We feel deep regret and anxiety over this situation.

It is therefore imperative for the parties concerned to bring the Middle East peace process out of its difficulties at an early date and to push it forward. We hope that the two sides will conform to the historical trend, cherish the progress made in the peace process since the Madrid Conference and try to achieve concrete results in their talks in a flexible and pragmatic manner and with courage and determination, so that the peace process will quickly return to the track of healthy development.

The Palestinian question has always been at the core of the Middle East question. An early, just and reasonable settlement of this question and the restoration of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people constitute a key link in the efforts to achieve peace, stability and development in the Middle East region. All peoples in the region aspire to a secure environment in which to live. However, that will only be a castle in the air without lasting stability and peace.

The half-century history of the Middle East question, particularly the developments in the peace process in recent years, have fully demonstrated that countries in the region can enjoy true security only when there is comprehensive and just peace. We sincerely hope that the parties concerned will settle their disputes through political negotiations on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace. Now they should strictly observe and implement the agreements already reached, respect each other, enter into dialogue on an equal footing to narrow differences, and avoid any move that might undermine the peace process, with a view to making further progress in the peace talks.

Since the end of the cold war all countries have been taking this rare opportunity of peace vigorously to develop their economies. The world economy is entering a new period of growth. However, the Middle East economy is seriously hampered by the unstable situation in the region. Foreign investment in the region — which has a population of more than 300 million — accounts for less than 1 per cent of the world's total investment, the lowest among all regions in the world. Experience has proved that comprehensive, just and lasting peace is the primary condition for economic development in the region, which will in turn help consolidate and promote peace and stability there. This is also the common understanding reached at the recent third Middle East and North Africa Economic Summit.

Self-rule has begun in Palestine. For historical and practical reasons, the economy remains in great difficulties. Support and assistance from the international community are therefore urgently needed to develop the economy in the self-rule areas to improve people's living standards rapidly. In this connection, developed countries should undertake greater obligations and, particularly, should carry out at an early date the commitments they have already made to assist Palestine. At the same time, the closure of the self-rule areas should be lifted immediately.

In recent years the United Nations has played an important role in resolving regional disputes and maintaining world peace, and has made contributions to the peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question and of the Middle East question as a whole. We hope and believe that the United Nations can play a positive role in promoting the Middle East peace process by rallying international support for the continued implementation by Palestine and Israel of agreements already reached and for continued peace talks between the two sides, thereby facilitating a comprehensive, just and reasonable settlement of the Palestinian and Middle East question.

It is our wish to see peace, stability and development in the Middle East region. China will, as always, work together with the international community for peace and stability in the region. China has already provided economic assistance within its capabilities to the Palestinian people through various channels. We will continue to do so to contribute our share to reconstruction in the Palestinian self-rule areas.

Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Each year on 29 November, the international community expresses its solidarity with the Palestinian people. We think there is an imperative need today to express solidarity with the Palestinian people, which continues to suffer so greatly from daily Israeli practices, including various forms of persecution, torture, murder, the destruction of houses and the continuing embargo imposed on the Palestinian people and its land.

We are also seeing attempts to change the status of the city of Al-Quds. Furthermore, the Israeli Government has resumed its settlements policies, building new

settlements and expanding existing ones in the occupied Arab territories.

The Government of Israel has not halted its practices or its acts of provocation. Indeed, it has opened a tunnel beside the Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem, causing a tragedy including the death of 80 persons and the wounding of 1,000 by the Israeli armed forces. These practices form part of the daily practices of Israel against the Arabs in the occupied territories, as clearly reflected in the report of the Secretary-General (A/51/678) of 18 November 1996. It has also been reflected in the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, specifically in document A/51/99/Add.2 of 18 October 1996.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report (A/51/543). We would also like to thank the Chairman and the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the detailed report contained in document A/51/35 of 19 November 1996. Paragraph 23 of that report notes the Committee's grave concern that the exacerbation of the situation on the ground as a result of the complete closure of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem in particular, has further stifled the Palestinian economy and caused immense suffering and hardship to the Palestinian people. The Committee has reported that some 300,000 Palestinians continue to live in extreme suffering in those territories.

The Committee has expressed concern at the Israeli Government's statement that it will extend its policy of land confiscation and settlement in the occupied territories, including Al-Quds, a policy it has pursued since 1967. That was announced by Israeli's National Infrastructures Minister, who stated that more roads would be built through the West Bank linking Jewish settlements to Israel. The Israeli Cabinet has decided to resume building settlements on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip and to simplify procedures for obtaining permits, placing them under the administration of the Ministry of Defence. Also announced was the provision of millions of dollars of assistance to settlers in the establishment of 4,000 West Bank settlements and the Israeli Government's intention to build 800 houses in the occupied Syrian Golan as part of a broader plan to construct 2,500 houses before the year 2000 and to establish three new settlements.

The report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories is an eloquent record. However, we would have liked more details on the atrocities committed against Arabs in the occupied territories. Yet there is some very clear writing on that subject, and anyone interested in the international community's concern about the new Israeli Government and its settlement practices should read that report. We consider the expansion of settlements as part of Israel's overall expansion policy; that policy is just as dangerous as that of building new settlements: both the establishment of new settlements and the expansion of existing ones are part of one policy to annex the occupied Arab territories.

In the light of the deterioration of the peace process, we should ask ourselves what the Israeli Government has in mind. What is the fate of the peace process in the light of those practices? The response to that question lies in the following facts. The Prime Minister of Israel has stated that Al-Quds is the eternal capital of Israel, in defiance of the sentiments of Arabs, Muslims, Christians and the international community as a whole, and of binding international resolutions. The Prime Minister refuses to withdraw from Hebron, and has tried to divert attention from the question of Palestine and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people by trying to reduce that question to a mere matter of withdrawal or non-withdrawal from the Avenue of Martyrs in Hebron. How can we believe that Israel is truly considering withdrawal from all the occupied Arab territories when the Israeli Government has made so much of withdrawing from a single avenue in a place where 100,000 Palestinians live.

The Israeli Government opened the tunnel; that act was condemned by the international community and the Security Council and was another thorn in the flesh of the peace process, despite the adoption of a Security Council resolution. Israel has not complied with Security Council resolution 1073 (1996), which calls on Israel to reverse its acts and to close the tunnel.

The whole point of current Israeli policy is to cause complications and to engage in acts of provocation, thus delaying the peace process. That is why the Prime Minister gave the green light to plans to prospect for oil in the Golan. He has now announced that three new settlements will be established and existing ones expanded, all of which contravenes the Geneva Convention and international law, and is another Israeli blow to the peace process. The Prime Minister has announced the Government's refusal to withdraw from the Golan and return to the 1967 borders. He refuses to

refer to the Madrid Conference and to the principle of land for peace as a basic principle of international law. That refusal runs counter to the determination of the international community, which has demanded the exchange of land for peace.

In the light of all those facts, and in the light of Israel's dangerous and deliberate policies, I believe the answer to the question I raised is clear: the Israeli Government does not want a just and lasting peace. It is not serious about resuming the peace process. It is attacking the peace process and placing more thorns in the flesh of the peace process. Can the peace process withstand any more thorns? How can Israel be serious about the peace process if it continues to pursue policies of extremism and expansion? Mr. Farouk Al-Shara', the Syrian Minister for Foreign Affairs, sent a message to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People saying that since the new Government in Israel came to power, the Israeli Government has missed no opportunity to repeat its intention to change the very basis of peace and to end all efforts made over the last five years, since the Madrid Conference.

In fact, Israel is no longer honouring the commitments it undertook during the previous Government's term of office. He also said that the Palestinian people cannot accept anything less than the attainment of its inalienable rights: the right to self-determination, the right to establish its own State and the right of refugees, in keeping with United Nations resolutions, to return to the homes from which they were uprooted.

There are many people in Israel who are unhappy with the policies of their new Government, which is trying to destroy the peace process. The international community must step up its efforts, as must the sponsors of the peace process — the United States and the European Union. The efforts to salvage the peace process and prevent a disaster in the region have been commendable, particularly since Israel is in favour of war rather than peace. The Israeli Government insistently refuses to respond positively.

We take this opportunity to salute the Palestinian people in the occupied Arab territories and elsewhere, and we reiterate our total support for its just struggle to recover its legitimate national rights. We hope that the international community — in particular the Security Council — will shoulder its responsibilities under the Charter and in accordance with international law and make Israel renounce its obstinate policy, cease establishing new settlements, halt its policy of annexing territory, and return to the peace process on the basis of the Madrid Conference, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and the principle of land for peace. Israel must honour the commitments undertaken in order to establish a just, lasting peace — an honourable peace that takes into account the interests of all parties, so that peace and stability can prevail in that region.

Mr. Allagany (Saudi Arabia): Today we are discussing the question of Palestine, an item inscribed on the General Assembly's agenda for the fiftieth time — that is, ever since the establishment of the United Nations. Last year, when we met here in the commemorative fiftieth session of the General Assembly, we were optimistic about the future work of the Organization. The historic Declaration adopted by the Heads of State underscored our agreed priorities: peace based on the principles and provisions of the Charter, an effective collective security system, equality and sovereignty among States, respect for the rights of people and justice in dealing with issues.

We were optimistic then about the signing of the Israel-Palestine Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip between President Yasser Arafat and the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. That Agreement was described as a landmark achievement on the way to the resolution of the question of Palestine. The question that now arises is: Has the situation changed for the better or for the worse?

Before I comment on the current report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to the General Assembly, I wish to express thanks and appreciation to His Excellency Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee, and to other members of the Committee, for the value of that report and for their efforts to resolve the question of Palestine. I wish to refer to that report in order to answer the question that I raised as to whether the situation had changed for the better or the worse. It says that, notwithstanding certain positive developments, the Committee has noted that the situation in the territories still under Israeli occupation remains a cause for concern. Indeed, new realities on the ground have been created that adversely affect in every way the future exercise by the Palestinian people of its rights, as well as the peace process itself. Of grave concern in this context are the confiscation of land and the question of settlements, including the activity in East Jerusalem. The Committee took note in particular of the plans to

establish more settlement dwellings and of the construction of roads linking settlements — developments that, in the final analysis, lead to the compartmentalization of the West Bank and the isolation of East Jerusalem.

What causes us to feel both sad and concerned is that the Israeli Government has not shown the serious commitment to the peace process demonstrated by the Arab side. Quite the contrary: since its assumption of power the Government of Mr. Netanyahu has persistently made public statements and pursued positions that cannot serve the peace process in any way. In contrast to the Arab commitment to the Madrid principles, Security Council resolutions, and the principle of land for peace, we find the declarations of the Israeli Government insistent on consolidating the Israeli occupation of Arab land and on maintaining the annexation of East Jerusalem, which is the first place to which Muslims turn for prayers and the third holy site in Islam. And we find the Israeli Government lagging in the implementation of the accords reached between the Israeli authorities and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The question of Holy Jerusalem is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict and remains the focal point of interest for the Arab and Islamic worlds. How this question is addressed will affect the entire peace process. It is regrettable that day in and day out the Israeli authorities continue to take measures aimed at creating demographic and institutional changes with a view to changing the status of Holy Jerusalem and thus affecting the outcome of the final negotiations in the final status talks. Israel must immediately cease its practices with regard to Jerusalem, which is an Arab city. The United Nations recognizes that it is an Arab city which has been occupied by Israel since 1967.

One of the most serious causes of tension and danger in the occupied Arab territories is the existence of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip and the persistent expansion of such settlements. We in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have noted with great concern the decision by the Israeli Government to lift the freeze on the building of new settlements. We consider these Israeli measures to be another factor in heightening tension and encouraging violence. Such practices also undermine the credibility of the Israeli Government on the question of peace.

International statistics estimate that about 93 per cent of the land of the holy city of Jerusalem has been confiscated. New measures include the expansion of existing settlements and the confiscation of land for the construction of roads in order to link the Israeli settlements together. Moreover, these roads are not being built in line with transportation needs, but are like superhighways, larger than airport runways. No one can really think that a settlement of 300 to 500 people requires a superhighway of that order, when Palestinian cities of 400,000 people do not have roads half that size.

In addition to the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Arab territories, we note a great deterioration in the economic and social living conditions of the Palestinian people. This is due primarily to the perpetuation of the Israeli occupation and the closure of the territories by the Israeli authorities since 25 February 1996. This has had serious consequences for agriculture and industry; many stores have been closed and there are serious shortages of basic foods such as bread and rice. All here have heard about the serious implications of the shortage of flour: Palestinians are forced to stand in long lines in order to obtain wheat flour for bread-making. This serious shortage has resulted from the Israeli authorities' halting the import of wheat flour from or through Israel. This lasted over a month, after which, claiming that it was "easing" the siege, Israel allowed the entry of 5 to 10 per cent of the amount of flour required by Palestinians for their daily bread. And what is true of wheat flour applies to other humanitarian supplies such as food and medicine. The renewed closure of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has intensified restrictions on the food imports and thus forced needy families to live on vegetables, without any bread at all. The question now is how Israel can be moving towards peace while denying Palestinians the flour they need for their daily bread.

The practice of torture and intimidation by the Israeli authorities and Jewish settlers against Arab citizens in the occupied Arab territories leads to nothing but the creation of a wall of distrust and hatred. This hatred has been intensified by the decision of the Israeli Supreme Court allowing Israeli interrogators to use torture against Palestinian detainees. We see this decision as a flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of the spirit of the peace process for the whole Middle East that started in Madrid, and of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment adopted by this Assembly. The Israeli-Palestinian peace process has reached a critical point. The impetus towards peace must be maintained by implementing the accords that have been reached or the

Middle East as a whole will suffer from the potentially vicious cycle of violence, conflict and bloodshed.

We in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia call upon the parties entrusted with the peace process in the Middle East, especially the co-sponsors of the Madrid Peace Conference — namely the United States of America and the Russian Federation — and the countries of the European Union, to move quickly and effectively in order to maintain the momentum generated by the peace process. We call on them to bring pressure to bear on Israel to comply with the rules of international law and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978) and 252 (1968), as well as with the principle of land for peace, in order to make the Middle East a region of peace, security and stability, as it was in the past.

Mr. Zlenko (Ukraine): It is becoming a tradition for the General Assembly to consider the question of Palestine on the day when the international community observes its Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This special occasion gives us a good opportunity to express our support for the Palestinian people in its aspiration to exercise its inalienable right to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty. Moreover, we have the possibility of determining, on the basis of objective analysis, the practical ways and means of achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of this long-standing problem.

The delegation of Ukraine is convinced that progress in this direction can and should be achieved on the basis of agreements reached at the Madrid Peace Conference and in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Full implementation of the Israeli-Palestinian agreements that have already been signed, in particular the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip of 28 September 1995, is a guarantee of further progress.

At the same time, the involvement of the United Nations in the peace process, both as a guarantor of international legitimacy and as an important factor in the mobilization and provision of international assistance, is essential for the successful outcome of the peace efforts.

During the year that has passed since we discussed this item at the fiftieth session of the General Assembly, the course of events on the Israeli-Palestinian track has been like a roller-coaster ride. The period has been marked by profound hopes and serious achievements, as well as by big disappointments and deep frustrations.

The first Palestinian elections, on 20 January this year, which followed the Israeli redeployment from six West Bank towns and a number of villages, revived confidence that the peace process had become irreversible and provided a solid basis for the self-determination of the Palestinian people. Another example of the continuous commitment to the cause of peace and democracy courageously pursued by the Palestinian people and its leadership was the decision taken on 24 April 1996 by the Palestinian National Council to amend the Palestinian National Charter so that it would no longer deny the right of the State of Israel to exist. That step, which shows that support for peace among the Palestinians is indeed widespread, was highly appreciated and commended in Ukraine.

At the same time, a renewed cycle of violence in the area resulting from acts by extremists, delays in the implementation of the agreements reached and sporadic closures of the territories, with grave economic consequences, has given rise to a feeling of despair over the very future of the peace process. It was with deep concern that the people of Ukraine learned of the tragic events in Jerusalem that followed the opening of the entrance to the tunnel in the vicinity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which led to the aggravation of the situation in the region and had negative implications for the Middle East peace process. In this regard, we wish to underline the important role played by the Security Council, which immediately responded to those events and adopted resolution 1073 (1996), which to some degree defused the situation.

As a member of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Ukraine maintains that there is no alternative to the process of Israeli-Palestinian political negotiations based on the principles of mutual respect, confidence, adequate understanding by each side of the other's interests and a readiness to come to a reasonable compromise. That is why, in our opinion, it is imperative that at the present stage mistrust and suspicion be overcome, that there be an end to provocative acts and confrontation, that previously reached agreements be implemented in good faith and that there be an early resumption of genuine and comprehensive peace talks aimed at a just and lasting solution of the problem of Palestine.

There is no doubt that simultaneous measures should be taken to achieve a comprehensive normalization of Arab-Israeli relations, the key element of which should

be real progress on the Israeli-Lebanese and Israeli-Syrian tracks.

The international community in turn should undertake all possible measures to contribute to the fullest extent possible to that process on the basis of effective coordination and complementarity, within the framework of the existing negotiating mechanisms. Proceeding from that understanding, Ukraine welcomes the efforts by the United States and the European Union aimed at strengthening confidence between the parties to the conflict and settling the remaining differences on the way to the implementation of relevant agreements.

The delegation of Ukraine believes that, apart from the political aspects of the problem, the economic development of the Palestinian territories and assistance in building and strengthening the Palestinian economy are acquiring an ever- increasing importance. In this context, the international community, including the United Nations, should give priority to the everyday needs of Palestinians and to mobilizing additional financial resources for the programmes and projects adopted at the Paris and Brussels Conferences. We are of the view that Israel's gradual integration into the economy of the Middle East region as a whole would contribute to regional economic stabilization.

Our delegation welcomes the activities of programmes and agencies of the United Nations system aimed at providing assistance to the Palestinian people, and supports the establishment of a coordinating mechanism to ensure effective disbursement of donor funds. In this regard, I would like to emphasize that the Palestinian people can count on the support of Ukraine which, with its considerable scientific and technological potential, stands ready to develop dynamic Ukrainian-Palestinian cooperation in the economic sphere, in particular in the sectors of housing and capital construction, water supply, education and training. We hope that the results of the fruitful meeting between the President of Ukraine, Leonid Kuchma, and the President of the Palestinian National Authority, Yasser Arafat, which took place three days ago at Bethlehem, will give significant impetus to the process of strengthening bilateral cooperation in both the political and the socio-economic fields.

Recent events in the region make it very clear that terrorism represents a serious threat to the Middle East peace process. Ukraine strongly condemns the brutal and violent practices employed by some extremist groups to undermine the efforts aimed at establishing peace in the region. We unconditionally reject terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, and we are convinced that peace in the region, as well as the settlement of the problem of Palestine, can be achieved only through constructive dialogue and on the basis of mutual respect and tolerance.

In conclusion, let me confirm Ukraine's steadfast commitment to the establishment of peace in the region and express our readiness to be actively involved in international cooperation to achieve a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian problem.

Mr. Abdullah (Malaysia): Today's debate is of particular significance as it coincides with the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. As we commemorate this auspicious occasion, my delegation hopes that the debate today will serve as a reminder to the international community of its continuing responsibility towards the Palestinian people in their quest for just and lasting peace and security in their homeland.

Since the beginning of the Madrid peace process in October 1991, some positive developments have taken place in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. The signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements in September 1993 between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel, and the subsequent agreements, especially the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1995 have led to the phased withdrawal of Israeli forces from 6 major West Bank towns and 450 villages, the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and the deployment of a Palestinian police force in the areas involved. These are indeed important political steps towards achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

This year, 1996, has also witnessed some additional encouraging developments which constitute further important steps towards the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian problem. This includes the first Palestinian elections to the 87-member Legislative Council and the Presidency of the Palestinian Authority on 20 January 1996, and the start of negotiations on 5 May 1996 on the permanent status of the Palestinian territory although these were adjourned after a number of procedural decisions were taken. The decision of the Palestinian National Council to repeal articles of the Palestinian National Charter which

were inconsistent with the agreements signed between the PLO and Israel was of historic and political importance. This, without doubt, was testimony to the commitment and sincerity of the PLO as regards a lasting peace settlement with Israel.

While some political progress has been made, we have also seen negative developments creeping in which could undermine or even undo the progress made thus far. My delegation is particularly concerned about the new policy adopted by the Israeli Government concerning the basis of the peace process, the principle of land for peace, and issues related to a final settlement especially on the questions of Jerusalem, settlements, the return of refugees and Palestinian sovereignty. There is no doubt that this change of policy contradicts the principles already agreed upon by both sides, especially the Declaration of Principles of 1993 and the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip of 1995.

Recent unilateral actions by the Israeli Government, such as closing areas under Palestinian jurisdiction, banning the traffic of persons and goods in the Gaza Strip, preventing Palestinians from entering and working in Israel, lifting the ban on the expansion of settlements, resuming the plan to build highways through the West Bank to connect Jewish settlements with Israel, and more recently opening the entrance to a tunnel in the vicinity of Al-Haram Al-Sharif in occupied East Jerusalem and delaying the redeployment of Israeli troops from Hebron, have only heightened tension between the Palestinian people and the Israeli Government and people. The opening of the tunnel alone led to tragic events resulting in the killing of more than 50 Palestinians and injuries to over 1,000 others by the Israeli army and police. These actions constitute serious setbacks to peace and might undo the entire peace process.

One of the policies of the new Israeli Government which is of serious concern to my delegation is that of renewed expansion of land confiscation and settlement. The resumption of the policy of the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, which had been banned under the previous Israeli Government in 1993, is most disturbing and indeed should be strongly resisted. The report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People tells us that on 19 September 1996 the Israel authorities approved plans to build another 4,000 housing units. The expansion will result in an increased number of Israeli settlers in the occupied areas. The negative consequences of this policy are obvious and will further complicate the delicate peace process. This policy must be immediately discontinued as it is a clear violation of international humanitarian law, in particular of article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. It is also against the provisions of agreements signed between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government which preserve the integrity and status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip during the transitional period, pending the outcome of the permanent status negotiations.

My delegation is particularly concerned with the human rights situation in the occupied territories as observed by the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories in its twenty-eighth report. The report concluded that:

> "the situation of human rights in the occupied territories has deteriorated remarkably since the beginning of the peace process, contrary to expectations". *(A/51/99/Add.2, p. 6)*

The deterioration, according to the report, is directly attributable to the policy and practices of the Israeli Government and authorities, carried out on the pretext of security needs, in the occupied territories. The Israeli Government should discontinue forthwith using security considerations as an excuse to justify its continued violation of human rights in the occupied territories.

While the overall picture on the political front is not entirely satisfactory, the economic and social situation on the ground remains equally bleak. The economic, social and living conditions on the ground have clearly deteriorated and have been further aggravated by the never-ending restrictions on movement and the closures imposed by the Israeli authorities. This is indeed regrettable — very regrettable.

The report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/51/35) has projected that the closure would cost the Palestinian economy $800 million by the end of this year. Average unemployment would be over 30 per cent, and in the Gaza Strip alone unemployment would increase to over 50 per cent. As the Palestinian economy continues to deteriorate, the social situation in the occupied areas is also worsening, especially in the area of public health. The closure has caused further deterioration in the health situation, particularly in Gaza, as the provision of foodstuffs and medical supplies was restricted. In addition, many people in need of urgent medical

treatment unavailable locally were denied permits to travel to the West Bank or to Israel. This clearly shows the grave ongoing socio-economic consequences of Israeli policies and practices for the people in the occupied areas.

For peace to flourish between the Palestinians, the Arabs and the Israelis, progress in the search for a permanent political settlement needs to be accompanied by economic growth and development, in particular an improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the population in the occupied areas. Immediate efforts must be made to alleviate the economic hardships with which the Palestinians are burdened. In this regard, my delegation wishes to pay special tribute to United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for its leading role, especially in the fields of education and health and in relief and social services in the occupied territories. In order to ensure that UNRWA can successfully carry out its difficult task, adequate and predictable financial resources must be made available. My delegation is concerned at the worsening of UNRWA's financial situation, which, if not immediately addressed, will adversely affect the Agency's effectiveness and viability. It is therefore critical for the international community, particularly the donor countries, to be more generous in their contributions to UNRWA. For its part, Malaysia will continue to contribute within its means to the Agency's General Fund.

My delegation also wishes to commend the role of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People under the leadership of Ambassador Ka of Senegal, and commends its bureau for its untiring efforts and its contribution to the cause of the Palestinian people.

My delegation urges the Israeli Government to honour scrupulously all the peace agreements it has entered into with the Palestinian Authority. Any departure from the agreements will only dash all prospects and hopes of achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region. The Israeli Government should desist from making any attempt to create new realities on the ground or to dictate new terms and conditions before resuming negotiations. We welcome the recent meeting between President Yasser Arafat and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu because we believe that to achieve progress both sides must continue their substantive negotiations on the basis of a genuine commitment and a willingness to find a lasting settlement based on an increasing sense of trust and understanding.

My delegation reaffirms Malaysia's total commitment to and unwavering support for the Palestinian people and its leadership in their quest for the restoration of all their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and the right to establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian nation and homeland. We are confident that the Palestinian Authority under President Arafat will steer the Palestinian people towards this end, which would, hopefully, contribute positively to the peace, security and prosperity of the region.

Mr. Samhan (United Arab Emirates) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It gives me pleasure on behalf of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates to extend our thanks and appreciation to Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and to the other members of the Committee and to wish them every success.

The General Assembly debate on the question of Palestine coincides with the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This is a reminder to the international community of its responsibility to support and assist the Palestinian people to resolve their problem. That problem began at the time of the establishment of the United Nations and has since been affected by international trends. United Nations debates have graphically demonstrated the scope of the plight of the Palestinian people — the chapters of oppression and deprivation of half a century of Israeli occupation.

Despite the political developments and the 1993 Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements and the subsequent agreements which committed Israel to withdraw from Palestinian territories it has occupied since 1967, actual events in the territories since the accords have been a cause of anxiety and frustration for the international community.

What is cause for concern regarding the future of this issue is that not only does the current Israeli Government resort to policies of equivocation, procrastination and selectivity in implementing the obligations undertaken by the former Israeli Government, but the current Government has actually backtracked on those legal obligations, which were set forth in the agreements concluded in the context of the peace process. All of this has fuelled the feelings of despair among the Palestinian people and heightened the tension in the occupied territories.

The delegation of the United Arab Emirates, which has carefully studies the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, expresses its disappointment over the issues monitored and analysed in the report. The statistics contained in the report clearly reflect the true intentions behind the Israeli practices. The most serious of these practices is the intensification of the policy of land confiscation, construction of new settlements and expansion of existing ones, especially in the city of Jerusalem, which undermine the Islamic and historic sites, including the complex of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Israel is thereby flouting its legal obligations under the peace accords based on international law and the principle of land for peace.

The current Israeli Government's decision to lift the restrictions imposed from 1993 by the previous Israeli Government on the building of settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and its agreement to the building of new settlements has contributed significantly over the past few months to the construction of thousands and thousands of new settlement units on the land assets and property of the unarmed Palestinian people. The number of immigrant settlers from all parts of the world aims at further judaization of the areas, a goal that has been pursued by successive Israeli Governments since 1948.

In order to impose this *fait accompli* within the Palestinian territories and to divert world public opinion from the expansionist policies, the Israeli Government, under the pretext of security, has resorted to a new method of collective punishment against the Palestinian people. It has implemented measures of seizure and prolonged closure of all Palestinian cities and villages and imposed harsh restrictions on the freedom of movement, work, trade, education, medical treatment, and so on. All of this has contributed significantly to the deterioration of the Palestinian economy and thus aggravated starvation, poverty, disease, death rates and unemployment as well as the lowering of local income to unprecedented levels.

All these Israeli measures are in addition to the measures of brutal force, oppression and arbitrary detention which are daily practices perpetrated by the Israeli authorities and settlers against the Palestinian people. An example was reported by both television and press agencies a few days ago, when Israeli soldiers were seen brutally mistreating some Palestinian labourers. This is cause for concern, as it is a violation of the most basic humanitarian code of conduct, the Fourth Geneva Convention and United Nations resolutions. These double standards in terms of human rights must therefore be given new attention by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The United Arab Emirates, which welcomes the peace process on the basis of international law and the land for peace principle, considers illegal and inadmissible all current Israeli measures aimed at changing the demographic composition and the legal status of the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories, including the city of Jerusalem, Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon. This applies also to the inhuman Israeli practices perpetrated against the Palestinian people under the pretext of security. Accordingly, we emphasize that the security sought by Israel will not be attained by maintaining its hold on Palestinian and other Arab territories nor by practices of suppression, military superiority and settlement building. On the other hand, it would be attained by complete Israeli withdrawal from all those territories and the unconditional and non-selective compliance with the entire principles of peace in the Middle East. This requires the international community, especially the sponsors of the peace process, to bring pressure to bear on the Israeli Government to reconsider its current policy based on defiance and obstruction.

Israel must fully implement its bilateral and international legal obligations, including, primarily, ending the construction and expansion of settlements, a complete and unconditional withdrawal from the city of Hebron, the release of Palestinian prisoners, and engaging in earnest negotiations in the permanent status talks with the Palestinian Authority in order to find a final and just solution to the question of Palestine. That requires an increase in the international assistance provided to the Palestinian people and the fulfilment of donor countries' pledges so that the Palestinian people will be able to rebuild the institutional development structures destroyed as a result of Israeli occupation. There is also a need to develop the self-reliance capabilities of the Palestinian people in order to promote social, economic, and human development.

In conclusion, the delegation of the United Arab Emirates believes that any peaceful and just settlement of the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, must emanate from the accords concluded between the Palestinian Authority and Israel and on the basis of the United Nations resolutions, especially General Assembly resolutions 181 (II) of 1947 and 194 (III) of 1948 and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). We underline the importance of expanding and revitalizing the role of the United

Nations, especially the Security Council, in this current transitional phase that faces the Palestinian people, in order to achieve self-determination and promote peace, security and stability on all national territory. We also renew our commitment to find an overall solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects, including the question of Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, security arrangements and national boundaries, in a way that ensures the decent and safe return of the Palestinian people to their homeland and enables them to exercise their national right to establish an independent state on all the Palestinian territory, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia): It is a matter of deep and profound concern to my delegation that our deliberations are being held against the backdrop of disturbing developments in the Middle East. Formidable difficulties are being encountered in the ongoing peace process. Palestinians are facing new challenges and obstacles in the struggle to attain their legitimate national rights and to establish a sovereign independent state. The new era of cooperation, reconciliation and justice, leading to stable peace in the region as promised by the historic Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements agreed between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel, is at real risk.

Over the past year we have of course witnessed a number of notable developments — the phased redeployment of Israeli forces from a number of Palestinian areas, the transfer of powers and responsibilities to the Palestinian Authority, and the holding of the first Palestinian elections in January 1996. Our sense of cautious optimism was further bolstered by the initiation of permanent status negotiations in May 1996 between the two sides, in accordance with the provisions of the Declaration of Principles.

These encouraging developments offered hope that they would lead to a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the principle of land for peace and respect for the rights of parties to the conflict. To our disappointment and dismay, however, the current peace process is in jeopardy as a result of the Israeli Government's policies, which are clearly inconsistent with the basic terms of reference of the peace process. The resumption of untenable settlement activities, the confiscation of Arab land and closure of the Palestinian territory, as well as the position taken on the issue of Jerusalem, threaten to undermine the peace process.

In September 1996, the deterioration in the situation reached new depths with the opening of a new entrance to the archaeological tunnel along the Western Wall of Al-Haram Al-Sharif in occupied East Jerusalem. Through its action, Israel endangered the security and integrity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque — and indeed the peace process itself. This alarming development, which triggered a violent confrontation resulting in a large number of deaths and injuries among Palestinian civilians, became the focus of a Security Council debate, with the participation of ministers for foreign affairs of a number of countries, and subsequently led to the adoption of Security Council resolution 1073 (1996).

Also over the past year, arbitrary closures of areas under Palestinian jurisdiction, reportedly the most draconian since the Israeli occupation in 1967, have had a severely impact on the nascent Palestinian economy. The prohibition on the movement of persons and goods within the areas, as well as between them and Israel and the neighbouring territories, has confined the population to small enclaves isolated from the outside world, including access to East Jerusalem. Unemployment has spiralled, as thousands of Palestinian people are deprived of their livelihood. Economic activities have come to a virtual standstill. Restrictions on medical supplies have caused a deterioration in health facilities. And, in a manner reminiscent of Israel's past practices, educational institutions have been summarily closed. The obstructions have also jeopardized assistance projects provided by the international community, thereby undermining the fabric and well-being of Palestinian society.

What we have been witnessing is nothing less than a collective punishment — in blatant contravention of the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 — of some 2.5 million Palestinians living in the occupied territories.

While the representatives of Palestine have adopted a balanced and reasonable approach and demonstrated their sincere wish to move the negotiations forward, the actions of the Israeli Government reflect a manifest lack of commitment to the peace process. Time and again, it has added fuel to the smouldering fires of frustration. We therefore call on Israel to implement without delay and in full the provisions of the various agreements already reached, including the redeployment of Israeli forces from Hebron and the commencement of negotiations on the final status of the occupied territories, including Jerusalem, and questions relating to refugees and settlements. In this regard, we earnestly hope that the

Middle East Summit held last October in Washington will spur the negotiations forward and expedite the full implementation of the peace accords.

In the light of the critical economic situation and the need to sustain the fragile peace, and until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are squarely met and a final settlement is reached in all its aspects, the United Nations will continue to have a permanent responsibility towards the Palestinian people. In this connection, it is imperative that the international community continue to extend assistance to the Palestinian people as it embarks on the challenge of nation-building. The process of rehabilitation should be completed in order to provide a firm foundation for building a stable, secure and prosperous state of Palestine.

As we near the end of the twentieth century, it is fitting to recall that no other conflict has so preoccupied the United Nations as the Arab-Israeli conflict, the core of which is the question of Palestine. The dangers of ignoring the plight of the Palestinian people, as well as their just cause to live in peace in their own homeland, are all too painfully obvious. After decades of instability and strife in the region, and too many missed opportunities, it is time to exert every effort to ensure that a just and lasting peace will ultimately prevail in the Middle East region, based on the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people.

Mr. Montoya (Colombia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The celebration today of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People gives particular significance to the debate in this plenary meeting of the General Assembly on the question of Palestine. The Government of Colombia, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, is pleased to join in this celebration.

The Non-Aligned Movement has closely followed developments in the process begun in 1991 at Madrid, which marked the opening up of fresh possibilities of finding a peaceful and negotiated settlement to the conflict that has afflicted the Middle East for so long. The establishment of a Palestinian state in a context of coexistence and mutual respect among the States of the region, together with effective attainment by the Palestinian people of its rights, are basic aspects which deserve our continued support.

As will be recalled, at the most recent Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement the Heads of State or Government expressed their unconditional support for the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people to secure respect for their inalienable right to self-determination and independence, and once again called on Israel to withdraw from all the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including Jerusalem.

The Movement also once again voiced its concern about Israel's attempt to alter the religious and historical nature of the Holy City. For this reason, the Movement has endorsed all Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on the question of Jerusalem. These include the agreements and conventions concerning the preservation of Palestinian institutions and the Islamic and Christian holy places in the Holy City of Jerusalem.

The provisions relating to the establishment of a provisional, autonomous Palestinian government should continue to be implemented so as to ensure that the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements signed in Washington, D.C., in 1993 can be applied as quickly as possible to all the occupied territories. To the same end, new measures are necessary in order to complete Israel's withdrawal from all the Arab territories occupied in 1967, thus ensuring that total peace and shared prosperity prevail throughout the area.

The United Nations has a great responsibility to bear with regard to the question of Palestine. That responsibility should continue until the Palestinian people exercises its inalienable right to self-determination, an independent and sovereign state is established in its national territory, and the problem of the refugees is settled pursuant to the relevant United Nations resolutions.

In order to maintain support for this process, it is also vital to promote the economic and social development of the occupied Palestinian territories. International assistance and cooperation are of great significance to this end.

On 25 November last, the ministers for foreign affairs of the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirmed the position taken at the most recent Summit of the Movement with respect to the question of Palestine and the Middle East. They also voiced their concern at the worsening of the situation in the region, and particularly the difficulties that the peace process has been experiencing as a result of Israel's refusal to put the agreements already reached into effect.

They called again on Israel to withdraw completely from all the Palestinian and other occupied Arab territories, including Jerusalem, southern Lebanon, the western Bekaa and the Syrian Golan. They again expressed their support for the peace process on the basis of the Madrid Peace Conference, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and the principle of land for peace.

In this way the Non-Aligned Movement has reaffirmed its long-standing and unequivocal support for the Palestinian people, in the hope of shortly seeing its just aspirations fulfilled as the outcome of its legitimate, unwavering and exemplary struggle.

Mr. Peleg (Israel): I would like, at the outset, to re-emphasize that the Government of Israel and the Israeli people yearn for and are committed to peace with all our neighbours. We have experienced too many wars in which tens of thousands of Israelis and Arabs have been killed. I would like to use this opportunity to call on my Arab colleagues to rededicate themselves, together with us, to reach peace in the region and to avoid war and violence.

It is now more than three years since Israel and the Palestinians embarked on the historic path down the road of peace. We knew then that the road to achieving a lasting peace would be long and arduous, but we also knew that this was the only path available to all of us.

At that time it was mutually decided that the only way to bring about a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is through direct, face-to-face negotiations between the parties themselves — Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization — and through mutual recognition. These negotiations led to the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements on 13 September 1993, and to the subsequent signing of the Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area of 4 May 1994 and the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip on 28 September 1995.

These agreements have served as the basis for a new relationship between Israel and the Palestinians in the interim period until a permanent status has been agreed upon. The agreements have led to real, positive changes on the ground. In May 1994, the Israel Defence Forces redeployed from Gaza and Jericho, transferring responsibility over these areas to the Palestinian Authority. Late last year, the Israel Defence Forces redeployed from the six major Palestinian cities on the West Bank, again transferring full power to the Palestinian Authority.

As a result, today over 70 per cent of the residents of Gaza and the West Bank, in the six cities and 450 towns and villages, live under the administration of the Palestinian Authority, which is responsible for running all their day-to-day affairs. Moreover, in January of this year, the Palestinians held open, democratic elections throughout Gaza and the West Bank for representatives to the Palestinian Legislative Council and the presidency of the Palestinian Authority.

Yet the fruits of the peace process have not been reaped without cost. During a span of eight days last February and March, Islamic fundamentalist terrorists murdered 63 Israeli citizens in four separate suicide attacks. Each one of these suicide bombers started on his murderous mission from areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority.

This situation necessitated the imposition of a closure of the territories. Israel is aware of and sensitive to the fact that the closure has economic implications for the residents of the West Bank and Gaza. This is the reason why we are taking active measures to ease the closure without, of course, compromising Israeli security. The number of Palestinian workers allowed into Israel, for instance, has been increased recently to 35,000 per day — 20,000 from the West Bank and 15,000 from Gaza.

The Government of Israel is committed to the peace process with the Palestinians, to the agreements signed with them, and to their implementation by both sides. This includes revoking the clauses of the Palestinian National Covenant that call for the destruction of the State of Israel, extraditing to Israel terrorists wanted for the murder of Israelis, disarming the Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorist groups that operate from areas under Palestinian control, and refraining from incitements to violence against Israel such as praise for terrorist acts, calls for a *jihad* (holy war) against Israel and threats to renew the *intifadah*. The Palestinian representative who spoke earlier in the meeting was interviewed only this week by the Arab weekly magazine *Al-Wasat*, which is published in London. He said, among other things, that there is great justification for the suicidal attacks carried out against Israel by Hamas and Islamic Jihad. That statement is in clear contradiction to the commitments undertaken by the Palestinians and Chairman Arafat.

For the past two months, Israel and the Palestinians have been conducting negotiations on the Israel Defence Forces' redeployment from Hebron. Israel is committed

to fulfilling its obligations as agreed in the Interim Agreement. But that redeployment cannot take place until the security of all the residents of Hebron, Jews and Arabs alike, is ensured and their freedom of access to worship at the holy sites is ensured. We trust that the agreement will be signed soon and we call on Chairman Arafat not to delay its signature anymore. Let us conduct our negotiations in an atmosphere of cooperation and not confrontation, through direct communication and not through provocations and threats.

After the completion of the implementation of the Interim Agreement, negotiations will open on the permanent status. The issues related to the permanent status, including settlements, will be negotiated directly between Israel and the Palestinians. The General Assembly should refrain from adopting resolutions on those issues, such as the draft resolutions before you, which tend to predetermine the results of the negotiations before they are concluded.

Furthermore, I regret that this year, once again, the United Nations General Assembly is being used for political purposes. The draft resolutions before us, and similar resolutions of past years, may possibly have satisfied their sponsors, but they definitely have not benefited the Palestinian people. The Palestinians know that the only way to advance their cause is through direct negotiation, and not through anachronistic resolutions or committees, the existence of which stands in clear contradiction to the peace process. For the sake of Palestinians and Israelis alike, let us redouble our efforts towards negotiations without extraneous resolutions.

The road to peace is long and irreversible and we will, together with the Palestinians, march down that road until full peace is concluded.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): We have heard the last speaker on the list for today's meeting. We shall now adjourn. The remaining speakers on this item will have the opportunity to speak at the next meeting, to be held on Monday, 2 December, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.

United Nations A/51/PV.69

General Assembly

Official Records

Fifty-first Session

69th plenary meeting
Monday, 2 December 1996, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Razali ..... (Malaysia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 35 (*continued*)

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/51/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/51/678)

Draft resolutions (A/51/L.33, L.34, L.35, L.36)

Mr. Al-Awadi (Yemen) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The question of Palestine is not a new item for this Organization; the General Assembly has been considering this issue for the past 50 years. Many unimplemented resolutions have been adopted in an attempt to resolve this question. This session is particularly important, however, because it is being held in the wake of recent difficulties in the peace process, a process that began with the signing by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, on 13 September 1993, of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements.

The new Israeli Government is now attempting in every way possible to hamper the implementation of this Agreement, to renege on previous commitments to withdraw from Palestinian lands in Hebron, and to impede progress that could lead to the second stage of the implementation of the Declaration of Principles, sponsored by the United States of America, in keeping with the agreement signed in Washington.

The Republic of Yemen welcomed the signing of the Declaration of Principles and subsequent agreements, as well as all steps and positive developments on the road to peace. It attaches particular importance to the bilateral Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the withdrawal from Hebron and the widening of Palestinian rule, which should lead to the final stage — the establishment of a Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital. We believe that these are positive steps towards enabling the Palestinian people to enjoy their right to self-determination within the framework of the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

We believe, therefore, that Israeli forces must be withdrawn from Palestinian lands — lands that have been occupied since 1967. The problem of refugees must be solved, and Israeli settlements built after 1967 must be dismantled. We believe that the status of Jerusalem must not be changed; an agreement has been reached to defer consideration of the issue. We also call on all States to abide by Security Council resolution 478 (1980) concerning the Holy City of Jerusalem.

We also call on the United Nations and the international community as a whole to continue providing assistance to the Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority in order to enable it to combat economic deterioration, poverty and unemployment and to build

96-86956 (E)

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economic and social infrastructures. This would promote the peace process and encourage progress in the implementation of the Palestinian-Israeli agreement towards peace in the Middle East region.

My country calls on all States that are assisting Jewish people to emigrate to, and settle in, occupied Arab and Palestinian lands to cease doing so. We call upon those States to exert pressure on Israel to stop building settlements and annexing land by force.

The question of Palestine is at the core of the conflict in the Middle East. The statements of the four summit meetings held in Cairo, Lyon, Florence and Yaoundé, respectively, in late June and early July of this year showed clearly how the viewpoint of the international community has crystallized with respect to the peace process in our region. The Republic of Yemen welcomes the statements of these conferences. We are particularly satisfied at the statement of the European Council meeting held in Florence, in which the European Union called for the respect of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and reaffirmed both its non-recognition of the annexation of East Jerusalem and the importance of the city to all parties in the region and to the international community as a whole, and this not only because of the respect due religious rights and institutions. The Union also expressed its wish to continue supporting the resumption of final status negotiations on the basis of the Oslo agreements and other subsequent ones between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The European Union also warned of the grave negative consequences of the closure by Israel of land under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority. On the other hand, it commended the cooperation between the Palestinian Authority and Israel with regard to security, noting that Israel's security can be guaranteed through a peaceful settlement respecting the interests of Palestinians and of the other parties to the peace process.

Recognizing the situation of the Palestinian Authority, which has remained committed to all the requirements of peace and related agreements, the group of seven major industrialized countries (G-7) and the Russian Federation have called for a lifting of the siege imposed on the Palestinians, which is causing them increased economic hardship, and for a resumption of negotiations on other tracks.

Such decisions are a source of satisfaction and comfort to us in the context of the peace process sponsored by the United States of America. However, the American sponsor, which has stood by the peace negotiations from the beginning, must continue to encourage their resumption and renewed impetus, in keeping with the decisions taken at the four summit meetings and with the principles upon which the peace process was initially based.

This session is being held at a time when grave developments are threatening peace and security in the Middle East region. The situation in Jerusalem and in all parts of the West Bank is explosive owing to the unjust attacks and harsh measures by the Israeli authorities against the Palestinian people and to the continued attempts to alter the status of Holy Jerusalem.

We condemn and denounce the practices of and the measures taken by the Israeli armed forces as well as their repeated attacks against Palestinian officials and citizens in Arab Jerusalem and other Palestinian cities, which have killed many and wounded hundreds. We denounce also the building of new settlements, the demolition of Palestinian homes and the construction of bypass roads for settlers, the continued siege of Palestinian lands and Israel's refusal to withdraw its forces.

We reaffirm the need to respect human rights on the basis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and we call for the protection of Palestinians in the occupied Arab territories. The Israeli Government must cease attacking and harassing Palestinian cities and villages. It must put an end to attacks by Jewish settlers against Palestinians. All of these measures violate the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, the two International Covenants on Human Rights, and other international norms of human rights.

These serious developments in the occupied Palestinian territories are likely to lead to a deterioration of the situation in the region and to a resumed cycle of tension and violence, thereby endangering peace and security not only in the Middle East but throughout the world.

Yemen reaffirms the need to move quickly towards a final settlement of the question of Palestine that will allow the Palestinian people to attain their legitimate rights, especially their right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital, in keeping with international law and with the fundamental principles established at the Madrid Conference and in the Oslo and subsequent agreements.

We call upon the sponsor of the peace to fulfil its responsibility to bring about a resumption of the peace process to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace for the region and the world at large. We continue to hope that the international community will continue to deploy its efforts to achieve those noble goals and to avoid the scourge of war for all mankind.

Mr. De Silva (Sri Lanka): May I at the outset convey to Ambassador Ibra Ka of Senegal, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the thanks of the delegation of Sri Lanka for his statement introducing the Committee's report. We wish to record our appreciation for the Committee's valuable work during the period under review.

The year that has ended has seen some noteworthy events in the lives of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories, following the many changes that have occurred since the initiative that was launched in 1991 at Madrid in the hope of ending their misery and securing a lasting peace in the Middle East. Those events are the holding of the first Palestinian elections to a Legislative Council and to the presidency of the Palestinian Authority, which are the embryonic steps towards the attainment of the final goal. Those events, in conjunction with the redeployment of the occupying Israeli forces from certain areas in the West Bank and Gaza, did in some measure contribute to the advancement of the peace process. Sri Lanka has welcomed those events as positive developments, as hopeful auguries for the future and as strengthening the institutional capacity of the Palestinian Authority.

There are, however, unhappily enough, other events that have cast a pall of gloom over these modest achievements and, in a sense, neutralized the benefits that would undoubtedly have accrued from the positive developments I have mentioned. These have been the recrudescence of violence consequent on the sense of desperation of a long-suffering people and the retaliatory measures taken by the Israeli authorities to impose a complete closure of the borders of the occupied territories, thereby preventing free movement, measures that have led to a virtual strangulation of the Palestinian economy and caused untold hardship to the inhabitants of those territories. These events have been detailed in the report of the General Assembly's Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, the contents of which, understandably enough, must cause feelings of guilt in some and of embarrassment in others, which emotions some have sought to assuage by suggesting that the work of the Special Committee is superfluous and should not continue, or by desiring its outright demise, presumably because they do not wish to be reminded of such melancholy events. One might imagine that the whole object is to ensure that the United Nations take some constructive action that would bring to an end the tragic events that have occurred in that land. It is, however, a matter for regret and disappointment that there is little evidence of that happening.

The causes of unrest and the instability of the peace process are plain to any perceptive observer of events. These are the resumption of the Israeli settlement policies and their expansion and consolidation, on the one hand, and, on the other, what are in effect the necessary correlatives of such practices, namely, the confiscation of Arab lands and the demolition of Palestinian houses on the flimsiest of pretexts, which are nothing but the denial of the basic elements of human existence. They are a direct outcome of the implementation of the policies of the Government of Israel that was elected in the middle of this year. The other major contributory cause of unrest is the long-standing closure of the borders, which has paralysed all economic life and impoverished the people to an unprecedented degree. As if those miseries were not enough, the horrendous violations of human rights continue unabated, and torture as an aid to investigation has been granted the stamp of approval of the judicial authorities of Israel. Similarly, the situation in East Jerusalem is worsening, and an attempt is being made to extinguish, slowly but surely, the Palestinian presence in the Holy City. This is one of the most volatile features of the whole question of Palestine and is likely to lead to consequences of an explosive kind that would unravel the whole peace process, whose reactivation is now being sought.

Over the years, the position of the Government of Sri Lanka has remained unchanged. We have constantly held the view that the final settlement of the question of Palestine is the *sine qua non* of a just, viable and enduring peace in the region. We adhere to the view that the Israeli occupation of the territory of Palestine and other Arab lands is illegal and that the withdrawal of Israel from those territories is an absolute necessity that admits of no qualification or equivocation. The inalienable rights of the Palestinians, which follow from their undoubted right to self-determination, must be respected, including their right to independent statehood.

Conversely, all States in the region have the right to live in peace within secure and internationally accepted borders.

We acknowledge the useful rule the United Nations has played in seeking to resolve the question of Palestine. In particular, we value the humanitarian assistance rendered to the Palestinian people in the economic and social spheres, and we appreciate the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. However, the United Nations has a far greater responsibility, namely, the fundamental duty of establishing peace and security in Palestine, which is integral to the whole question of peace in the Middle East. Having taken the initial step of creating the State of Israel nearly half a century ago, it cannot abdicate its responsibility for ensuring a final settlement of this problem, which has remained intractable for so long a time.

It is a matter for regret that, where the practical effectiveness of resolutions of both the General Assembly and the Security Council on the question of Palestine are concerned, the record is very disappointing. There is perhaps no other area in which the international community has displayed such a lack of resolve, and even faint-heartedness, and such a disinclination to enforce its decision in ways and through means that are clearly open to it, than in that of Palestine. This is indeed a serious shortcoming, and one that opens the United Nations to the charge of adopting double standards in dealing with recalcitrant elements that violate international law and the universally accepted norms and standards of behaviour required of Member States. The deference shown considerations of *realpolitik* in the face of issues of justice will inexorably erode and undermine the Organization's moral authority and standing in the world.

The prevailing sense of disappointment and disenchantment among Palestinians as a result of these unfortunate events does not augur well for the peace process. The primal need of the hour is to rekindle the sense of hope among the desperate people of Palestine and generate in them sufficient trust and faith that the international community will not abandon them after holding out before them for nearly half a century the prospect of peace and the inalienable right to independent statehood that has been cruelly denied to them for so long.

Mr. Kaabachi (Tunisia) (*interpretation from Arabic*): At this session, the General Assembly is considering, as it has done for decades, the question of Palestine and the suffering of the Palestinian people following the confiscation of their lands and their forcible exile at the end of the 1940s, and in the wake of the successive wars the region has experienced.

Consideration of agenda item 35, entitled "Question of Palestine", coincides with the commemoration by the General Assembly and the international community of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. We believe that this coincidence is of special importance because the question of Palestine remains at the heart of the Middle East conflict. Consequently, a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Middle East conflict must include the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and the right to live in peace and security with all peoples and States of the region, and the building of an independent state.

The question of Palestine has enjoyed the support of the international community and the General Assembly. This has encouraged the Palestinian people to continue their struggle to ensure the liberation of their lands so that they can realize their legitimate aspirations. The General Assembly has adopted at successive sessions resolutions that support the Palestinian people, reaffirm their right to enjoy their inalienable and legitimate rights, and support their struggle to that end. Here the delegation of Tunisia reaffirms the need for the United Nations to continue to play its essential role and shoulder its full responsibilities until the Palestinian people are able to realize their legitimate aspirations, including the right to self-determination, and build an independent state, in keeping with General Assembly resolutions and the principles of international law.

The international community welcomed the peace initiative on the Middle East that began at the Madrid Conference in March 1991 and the negotiations that followed, which led in particular to the Oslo, Washington and Cairo agreements. The main goal of this initiative for peace is still to ensure a just and lasting peace in the Middle East region on the basis of international law and the right of peoples to self-determination, a rejection of occupation, and the implementation of the principle of land for peace. Tunisia participated in the multilateral negotiations, as it has done since the outset.

We recognize the importance of these negotiations for the bilateral negotiations aimed at establishing a climate conducive to the exercise by the Palestinian people of the right to self-determination and at securing the right of all peoples of the region to live in a climate

of peace and security. We believe, therefore, that efforts to establish economic cooperation and to encourage trade and investment between the States of the Middle East and the countries of North Africa should be developed, but consider that this will be possible only if a just and comprehensive peace is ensured.

Tunisia, like other peace-loving States, supported the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which enabled the Palestinian people to exercise authority over Gaza and the liberated areas of the West Bank, and we hope to see full implementation of the Agreement. We hope also that negotiations will be continued so as to find a lasting and honourable solution to all pending issues and ensure Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif; the establishment of an independent Palestinian state; and the return of Palestinians to their lands.

Mr. Martínez Blanco (Honduras), Vice-President, took the Chair.

However, our fears were confirmed when the Israeli Government went back on these agreements and its commitments. Israel's reneging on the agreements concluded with the Palestinian Authority represents a slap in the face to the international community and to the sponsors of peace. This arrogance, and the danger of halting the peace process and allowing for a return to confrontation and tension in the region, are all factors in the current situation. The siege imposed on the Palestinian people in the regions where they have exercised autonomy for several months and the continued occupation of their lands, which have brought economic activity to a halt and led to a decline in trade and investment, and to a deterioration in the living conditions of the Palestinian people, do nothing to inspire confidence — quite the contrary. The siege and the suffering of the Palestinian people can only heighten tension and increase the likelihood of violence.

Israel insists on reneging on the agreements reached on Hebron, and refuses to implement other commitments relating to the interim transitional period, thus hampering the peace process. Israel's continued policy of occupation and its discriminatory measures, human rights violations and settlement-building contravene the principles and objectives of the peace process and, indeed, stand in its way.

Israel must apply, unconditionally and in full, the agreements entered into with the Palestinian Authority and resume negotiations to arrive at a comprehensive solution. Israel must also withdraw unconditionally from the Golan and southern Lebanon in keeping with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 425 (1978). The Israeli-Syrian negotiations must be continued, resuming where they left off. Furthermore, the Palestinian people must be enabled to exercise legitimate national rights, and Israel's forces must withdraw from southern Lebanon. This is the basis for peace and security in the Middle East.

The offer made to Lebanon is not valid. It is simply a delaying tactic to avoid implementation of the ultimate goal — that is, total withdrawal from occupied Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian territories.

In conclusion, I wish to recall President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's recent statement that, although we had welcomed the start of the peace process in the Middle East, we wished to express our grave concern at the halt in the partial Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and in the Israeli-Syrian negotiations because of Israel's arrogance.

We hope that the sponsors of the peace process will ensure that the negotiations and agreements are respected so that the principle of land for peace can be implemented.

Mr. Campbell (Ireland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The following associated countries have aligned themselves with this statement: Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

The past year has not been a good one in the Middle East peace process. Targets that a year ago appeared to be within reach have since become more distant and difficult to attain. There have nevertheless been some remarkable achievements that are worthy of mention. Not least of these was the holding of the first democratic elections for the Palestinian Authority. Furthermore — with the obvious exception of Hebron — all 457 Palestinian cities, towns and villages have now come under local Palestinian control. We remain hopeful that the redeployment of Israeli security forces in and from Hebron will take place without further delay so that the permanent status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority can proceed, as has been planned since last May.

We have stated on several occasions that peace in the Middle East region is a fundamental interest of the

European Union. We believe that the peace process is the only path to security and peace for Israel, the Palestinians and the neighbouring States. The European Union remains dedicated to supporting it. Our aim is that Israel and its neighbours may live within secure, recognized and guaranteed borders and that the legitimate rights of the Palestinians shall be protected.

We declare ourselves ready accordingly to play an active part in the efforts to achieve a successful outcome to the negotiations that have now been resumed between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. We are furthermore committed to making significant financial contributions to promote the social and economic development of the Palestinian people and to assist in the Palestinian Authority in its administrative functions. The European Union continues to be, as a whole, the major donor of funds to the Palestinians. We have already pledged 500 million ECUs in aid for the 1994-1999 period, with the goal of assisting in the consolidation of the Palestinian Authority and of improving the living conditions of the Palestinians. This is commensurate with our interests in the region and should be seen in the context of our major contribution to the peace process so far.

The essential principles on which peace for the region must be based have been reaffirmed many times by the European Union. They are already enshrined in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). The key principles — self-determination for the Palestinians, with all that that implies, and land for peace — are essential to the achievement of a just, comprehensive and durable peace.

The Council of Ministers of the European Union, meeting in Luxembourg on 1 October, pointed out that urgent action was needed on several issues of great importance. We believe that action must now take place in the following areas if progress in the peace process is to be maintained: there must be timely implementation of the agreements already reached — notably redeployment from Hebron and the release of Palestinian prisoners; positive steps must be taken to relieve the economic plight of the Palestinians, including the further easing of border closures, the guaranteeing of safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank and the lifting of obstacles to international aid efforts and the realization of infrastructural projects; full cooperation should exist between the two sides in order to ensure internal security both in Israel and the areas under Palestinian authority; measures that prejudice the outcome of the permanent status negotiations must be avoided, including annexation of land, demolition of houses, new settlement construction and expansion of settlements; and the next stage of negotiations, as set down in the Declaration of Principles agreement, must begin as soon as possible.

In keeping with the European Union's desire to assist the peace process, the Heads of Government of the member States, meeting in Dublin on 5 October, reiterated their concern over events in the occupied territories at the time and reaffirmed their willingness to play an active part in efforts to recommence negotiations. They dispatched the Irish Foreign Minister on a mission to Israel and the Gaza Strip in order to convey the Union's support for the urgent revitalization of the peace process. As a concrete demonstration of our determination to play an active, constructive and balanced role, the Council of Ministers, meeting in Luxembourg on 28 October, appointed Ambassador Moratinos as the European Union's envoy to the peace process. Following this, the European Union troika of Foreign Ministers from Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands travelled to Damascus, Amman, Gaza and Cairo from 9 to 11 November for wide-ranging discussions with the regional leaders.

In conclusion, we consider it essential to reclaim the spirit of the Madrid and Oslo agreements, and we urge all parties to implement these agreements fully. There can be no alternative to a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Palestinian question and to the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole. The European Union confirms its attachment to such a solution and its readiness to assist its achievement in every way possible.

Mr. Owada (Japan): The Madrid Conference, held in October 1991, was indeed a historic landmark in the Middle East peace process. We in the international community have since given our wholehearted blessing to the significant progress that has been achieved and have extended our utmost cooperation to expedite the process. Japan has been an integral part of these international efforts, participating actively in the multilateral talks, in particular as Chairman of the Working Group on the Environment. It is most gratifying to note in this connection the holding in January 1996 of elections for the Palestinian Council and the concurrent establishment of the Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority. These were among the most eloquent testimonies to this progress. It is worth noting that these achievements were made possible by the patient and persistent efforts of all the parties involved in the peace process, including the Palestinian people, led by Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman

of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority.

In recent months, however, we have been witnessing the development in the region of a distressing and even ominous new situation. The vicious circle of events that seems to have started against the background of the current impasse in the Middle East peace process — a result of the halt in the negotiations between the parties directly involved following the tragic demise of Prime Minister Rabin of Israel — has come seriously to cloud the prospects for peace. A sense of frustration has developed among the peoples in the region, and there is a danger that it could trigger desperate and destructive actions. The clashes that took place in September between Palestinians and Israeli troops in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are just one of the symptoms of this dangerous situation, which, if left unattended, could affect the very viability of the peace process. These outbreaks of violence must be recognized as an expression of this frustration at the lack of improvement in the situation.

The closure of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which has now lasted for almost 10 months, has resulted in a sharp rise in unemployment, causing great hardship to the Palestinian people and seriously reducing the revenues available to the Palestinian Authority. Japan does not deny that Israel has the right to ensure its own national security. We in Japan recognize as legitimate the aspiration of the Israeli people to live in peace in the region. At the same time, however, it is also legitimate for the Palestinian people to insist that this right be exercised in a way that does not deprive them of their right also to live in peace in the region. Japan, while recognizing the legitimate security needs of the Israelis, urges Israel to take measures to lift the closure without delay.

The negotiations on the issue of Hebron are continuing, but a number of unresolved issues need to be addressed. Unless and until they are resolved, we cannot be optimistic about the positive prospects of those negotiations. The Government of Japan sincerely hopes that the parties concerned will address those issues in a serious manner and in good faith so that an agreement on the issue of Hebron may be reached as soon as possible, and that the agreements they have already reached on other matters will be implemented without delay. For this purpose, the parties directly involved must first of all strive to bridge the chasm of mistrust that separates them by refraining from any action that could spark further violence. At a more fundamental level, it is imperative that the parties intensify their efforts, in good faith and with steadfast determination, to advance the peace process. It is absolutely essential that both sides summon the courage to take concrete steps to implement the commitments they made in Madrid and Oslo and thereafter.

Japan has been contributing its share to the creation of an environment conducive to peace by participating actively in the multilateral talks, which have proved to be of great value in facilitating the peace process. Japan is determined to continue and further intensify its efforts in this direction. It was with this determination that in late August our Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Ikeda, visited the region in order to urge the parties to renew their commitment to peace and make further efforts to advance the peace process. Again, the Government of Japan invited Chairman Arafat to Tokyo in September for in-depth discussions on a range of relevant issues. More recently, the special envoy of the Prime Minister was sent to Egypt, Israel and the Gaza Strip in October to engage in an intensive dialogue with the parties concerned on advancing the peace process.

In this process of promoting peace, Japan believes that assistance to the Palestinian people is an essential ingredient in creating a favourable environment for stability and peace-building. In this spirit, Japan continues to extend assistance to the parties concerned. Since 1993, it has contributed approximately $240 million in assistance to the Palestinians. In order to alleviate the hardships of the Palestinian people caused by the closure, the Government of Japan extended $3 million in September, and only last week, it decided to extend an additional $3.5 million in emergency assistance to the Holst Peace Fund of the World Bank. It is Japan's hope that these additional contributions will help the Palestinian Authority overcome its present difficulties.

The Middle East peace process, and particularly the Palestinian track of the process, is at a crucial phase. In addition to the implementation of the agreement on the expansion of Palestinian self-rule, many difficult tasks still remain, including negotiations on a permanent status agreement. Japan wishes to appeal to the parties concerned to confront these issues with tenacity and foresight, so that the Palestinian and Israeli peoples may look forward to a future in which they can pursue their lives in peace and prosperity. For its part, Japan will spare no effort in cooperating with them in solidarity in order to promote the Middle East peace process and to contribute to the social and economic development of the region.

Mr. Buallay (Bahrain) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Last year the world's leaders marked the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. On that historic occasion, they reiterated their commitment to the principles and purposes of the Organization. They also expressed their resolve to foster peace, development, security, equality and justice in the service of peoples toiling under colonialism or any form of foreign domination or occupation.

It is unnecessary to list the issues, problems and events dealt with by the United Nations, or its contributions to settling disputes and conflicts and to preventing the outbreak of war in many parts of the world, or its positive role in encouraging development and reconstruction in many Member States.

Even though the question of Palestine has been a concern of the Organization since its establishment, it still remains on the United Nations agenda. Many wars have erupted in the Middle East; these have been a source of concern and suffering for the region and have led to countless deaths. Owing to these conflicts, the region has not been stable — and will not be stable so long as the question of Palestine is not resolved in a just manner.

The State of Bahrain is convinced that a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of Palestine must be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and on the principle of Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds, and from the other occupied Arab territories. Peace must also be based on respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within internationally recognized boundaries, and on recognition of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, especially the right to self-determination. These rights are fundamental principles that have gained the full support of the international community, because they stem from the letter and spirit of the Charter. This question will not be resolved and conditions will never be stable in the region unless those rights are exercised.

In recent years we have seen signs of a new era of optimism after the positive developments stemming from the start of the Madrid peace process in 1991, which created a new atmosphere among all parties, paving the way to peace. The Arab States supported that process, hoping for a resolution that would open up new vistas for peace and stability in the region and that would command the support of the international community. The Palestinian people saw hopeful signs in these developments and initiatives and looked forward to going back to their homeland, Palestine, to end their lives of displacement and suffering. After difficult negotiations, the Oslo Agreement was signed with Israel in 1993, followed by other agreements and the start of their implementation. As a contrast to the optimism that prevailed following the signing of these agreements, however, pessimism spread in the region after statements by Israeli leaders going back on their commitment to the implementation of the provisions, and after the Israelis did not apply them or abide by the specified dates for implementation.

Time and again, Israel stated that these dates were not sacrosanct. This in turn gave rise to frustration among the Palestinians and to a loss of hope for a just political solution. Thus, bloody events took place in Palestinian cities. Israel's leaders used security as a pretext for shirking the implementation of these commitments and accords. Worse, they are now calling for reconsideration of the accords that were officially signed. Events in Al-Quds and the Palestinian territories in September due to the opening of a tunnel under Islamic sites in Al-Quds in an attempt to Judaize and conceal those Islamic sites indicate that Israel does not want stability to prevail in the region. On the contrary, Israel seeks by these actions to provoke the feelings of all Muslims. It knows that opening the tunnel was aimed against Arabs and Muslims.

We state these facts and events to show that Israel is deliberately erecting obstacles in order to halt the Middle East peace process through its repressive practices and its encouragement of radical parties and organizations to interfere in all aspects of Palestinian affairs. I refer particularly to the current administration in Israel, which pretends to abide by the peace process while it postpones the implementation of the Oslo Agreements. This is clear in the way it is addressing the Hebron issue, whose many complications make it the main question. In addition, it has increased annexations and the building of settlements, and has ceaselessly expanded old settlements. The new Israeli Government expressed its lack of desire for peace when it lifted the freeze on building new settlements and introduced other measures to expand existing ones.

The question of Palestine is the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Peace and security cannot prevail in the region unless this question is solved. The right of the Palestinian people to return to their homes, in accordance with paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III), is one of the main pillars of a solution of the

Palestinian question. Israeli settlements must be eliminated from the Palestinian territories; Jerusalem must be restored to the Palestinians so that they can exercise their full rights on their own land; the thousands of Palestinians in Israeli prisons must be released; and all agreements signed by Israel must be implemented.

Based on its eagerness for the peace process in the Middle East to continue, the State of Bahrain appeals to the international community, particularly to the two sponsors of the peace process and to the States of the European Community, to urge Israel to halt its repressive practices against the Palestinian people, implemented through aggression, expansion and settlement in the Arab territories. My country reiterates the need for the peace process to continue in the Middle East. Without a doubt, this is a strategic choice in favour of the stability and prosperity of the region. The peace process should be based on United Nations resolutions and on the principle of land for peace.

We are all hopeful that the region will begin a new era marked by peaceful coexistence and cooperation among all parties on the basis of mutual respect.

Mr. Baali (Algeria) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Only a few days separate us from the anniversary of the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) on the partition of Palestinian territories between Arab citizens and Jewish settlers from all over the world, which led to crisis and war.

The question of the Palestinian people has long been before the United Nations. The General Assembly has devoted an agenda item to it, entitled "The question of Palestine", which has been discussed at every session of the General Assembly without arriving at a solution to the Palestinian question or at the exercise by that people of its legitimate right to live on its own lands.

The Madrid Peace Conference, which was sponsored by the United States of America and the former Soviet Union, represented an important turning point in the history of the Middle East. It was a unique occasion for the parties to sit at the negotiating table with a view to seeking a solution to the problem of the Middle East. Interim arrangements were completed — beginning with the Oslo Agreement between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel — as were other agreements on Palestinian-Israeli and Israeli-Jordanian questions.

Hopes were raised after that positive stage that a final solution would be reached to put an end to the Middle East conflict despite the many obstacles along the road to peace. However, that stage did not last long. In fact, circumstances changed drastically after the Likud party took power in Israel. That Government announced that it was going back on commitments entered into with the Palestinian party by the former Administration. The new Administration refused to implement completely the agreements which had been concluded. This hobbled the negotiations and threatened the pursuit of peace. The reaction of the world was to condemn the Government of Israel for having gone back on agreements which it had concluded, for shirking its obligations and for using a variety of pretexts for shirking its responsibilities.

We do not hesitate to cast full blame on Israel alone. The fact is that the Government of Israel imposed arbitrary exactions on the population. These included the brutal repression of Palestinians, the imposition of an economic embargo, the confiscation of land and the pursuit of the policy of building settlements. These contradict the letter and the spirit of the agreements concluded with the Palestinian party and with internationally binding resolutions. In particular, it violates resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

The status of Al-Quds is an example which shows how sensitive the Palestinian question is. No one is unaware of the significance of that city for the Arab and Islamic world, as well as for other religions. No one was therefore surprised last September when a large number of victims resulted from clashes between Palestinian citizens and the Israeli forces of occupation. This was the result of the decision by the Israeli Administration to open a tunnel close to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, ignoring Palestinian feelings, and showed that the Israeli Administration had no intention of preserving the status of Jerusalem until the final negotiations on the future of that city. The decision by Israel defied all Security Council decisions providing that the demographic and urban composition of the city should not be changed and that the Israeli declaration of that city as its eternal capital was null and void.

A resolution of the question of Palestine must be undertaken in the context of a comprehensive solution in the Middle East. Any attempt to achieve a just peace in the region is necessarily predicated on putting an end to

Israeli occupation of the Golan and southern Lebanon, in keeping with Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 479 (1980). Israel's failure to fulfil its responsibility to withdraw from those occupied territories is in flagrant contradiction of the very basis of the peace process — land for peace, in keeping with the provisions of the Madrid Conference.

This policy shows that Israel is not serious about seeking peace. It is simply trying to obtain a peace which would serve its own interests and security without returning occupied Arab territories to their legitimate Arab occupants.

The deterioration of the situation in the Middle East is of serious concern to Algeria. In fact, the promising prospects which were opened up by the Madrid Conference were expected to lead to results if responsibilities were fulfilled and if negotiations were undertaken in good faith. Algeria, which has continuously supported the pursuit of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace for the region, reaffirms its support, in principle, for the Madrid Conference, for the principle of land for peace and for the need to implement resolutions of the Security Council and to respect the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. These are the principles on which we base our participation in the Madrid Conference, as well as the credibility of the peace process.

We are convinced that there is no solution which can ensure a true settlement of the Middle East question other than the withdrawal by Israel from all the Arab territories occupied since 1967, and enabling the Palestinian people to establish an independent State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. It is the responsibility of the international community, and particularly that of the sponsors of the peace process, to guarantee the pursuit of peace and to shelter the peace process from Israeli arrogance and non-compliance with commitments.

Mr. Al-Midhadi (Qatar) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The General Assembly is once again meeting to consider the item on the question of Palestine, which has been on the agenda for half a century.

It was the United Nations that laid the basis for a just solution guaranteeing the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people including the establishment of an independent State on its national soil. Through its resolutions it created a favourable atmosphere for achieving a just peace, which almost came about with the signing of historic agreements between the Palestine Liberation Organization and the previous Israeli Government.

We commend the efforts made by the United Nations and its organs and agencies to support a solution to the Palestinian question and to help the Palestinian people.

The hopes of the Palestinian people and our hopes flourished with the signing of the Oslo, Washington and Cairo agreements. Those agreements gave impetus to the peace process between the Palestinians and Israelis, which was reflected in the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, the redeployment of Israeli troops from most towns of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the holding of Palestinian elections leading to the establishment of the Palestinian Legislative Council and the Palestinian Presidency.

But the Israeli-Palestinian peace process has been hampered by the new Israeli Government, whose declared positions reveal that it is delaying the fulfilment its commitments under the signed bilateral accords. That has been clear since it took office. The opening of the tunnel next to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the ensuing violent Palestinian reaction highlight Palestinian fears about the Israeli Government's stand, and affirm the Palestinians' categorical rejection of the building and expansion of settlements and the challenges and provocations faced daily by the Palestinians.

The policy of the current Israeli Government is contrary to reality, reflecting a doctrine of military hegemony and occupation and the imposition of *faits accomplis*. This intransigent position could completely destroy the peace process. Serious efforts were made for that process. Yet the Israeli Government is attempting to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian State, in order to perpetuate Israeli control and hegemony in the occupied territories and to prevent the exercise of Palestinian sovereignty, riding roughshod over all the agreements and the instruments signed by the previous Government.

Jerusalem has had a unique place in the Palestinian question since the beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Since Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem, more than 28 years ago, the Israeli Government has tried to judaize the city by distorting its identity, changing its demographic character, deporting Palestinian inhabitants and reducing their numbers through the application of military, administrative and legal measures, moving settlers into

the city and expanding Jerusalem's borders to prejudice the final status of the city. The situation in Jerusalem today is very tragic. Jerusalem is not a purely Palestinian question. It is an Islamic, Arab, Christian and international question. Hence, its resolution rests on the international community as a whole.

The State of Qatar has categorically rejected any change in Jerusalem's legal status, or demographic and geographic characteristics. We have called on the international community to safeguard and protect the holy sites there. The State of Qatar therefore supports the draft resolution presented by the Palestinian leadership. It offers a responsible solution to the question of the entire city of Al-Quds, both its eastern and its western parts. All freedoms must be respected, including the right to worship of the followers of the three divine religions. Arab Al-Quds should go to the Palestinians and West Al-Quds should go to the Israelis, on the principle of peaceful coexistence and cooperation. There must be effective implementation — if Israel has the required political will. The international community must pressure the Israeli Government to change its current position. Al-Quds cannot be wrested from the heart of Palestine; no peaceful solution can be achieved without resolving the question of Al-Quds.

The establishment of a Palestinian State and its national institutions requires a solid economic base; until now the Palestinian economy has deteriorated under protracted Israeli occupation. The Palestinian Authority attached great hopes to the achievement of peace in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Authority received from donor countries pledges of $2.4 billion in economic assistance. However, the donor countries have been slow in extending assistance. That has been complicated by the stringent Israeli security measures and the closure of the territories, which have caused a deterioration in the economic situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The masses are suffering as a result of those measures. The State of Qatar appeals to the international community, particularly the richest States, to extend a helping hand to the Palestinian people. We hope that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the United Nations Development Programme, and the United Nations Children's Fund, agencies that have long operated in the Palestinian territories, will implement the projects recommended by the high-level working group established by the Secretary-General after the Declaration of Principles was signed to explore new activities to stimulate the Palestinian economy.

Guided by the judicious guidelines of the Emir of Qatar, His Excellency Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, my country wishes to support the just struggle of the Palestinian people and its legitimate aspiration to establish an independent State on its own soil. We express our grave concern at continued Israeli usurpation of Palestinian lands and the expansion of settlements in Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the West Bank. Undoubtedly, the international community joins in our call for the resumption of serious, sincere negotiations on a pull-out from Hebron and subsequently the resolution of the final status of the Palestinian territories under the Oslo accords, the implementation of relevant United Nations resolutions and the exercise by the Palestinian people of its legitimate rights, particularly the establishment of an independent State of its own. We all know that there can be no lasting solution to the Palestinian question or to the Middle East problem without the establishment of a Palestinian State.

Mr. Kharrazi (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I should like to reaffirm the support of the Government and the people of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the Palestinian people, who for decades have been struggling to regain their inalienable rights and aspirations. The people of Palestine continue to be subjected to the most harsh and inhuman treatment by the occupying Power. In the past year, the most severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods have been imposed upon the occupied territories, resulting in considerable hardship for Palestinians in their everyday life.

The latest report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (A/51/99/Add.2), and the reports of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/51/13) and of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/51/35) clearly describe the destructive effects of the prolonged closure of the occupied territories on the economic and social situation of the Palestinians. For the first time, the occupied territories were subjected to total internal closure, causing much suffering among their inhabitants. According to these reports, the living conditions of Palestinian refugees have declined by 40 per cent, unemployment has increased by up to 60 per cent, and at least 10 per cent of the population of the occupied territories are believed to be living below the poverty line.

The restrictions imposed on freedom of movement have on several occasions had a catastrophic effect on the lives and health of the Palestinians, and consequently some patients requiring emergency medical treatment have died behind Israeli checkpoints. Thousands of students have missed their academic year, and many of them were arrested when their educational centres were raided by Israeli paratroopers and members of undercover units.

Killings and the detention and ill-treatment of detainees are among other practices of an inhumane nature employed by the occupying forces. More than 3,200 Palestinians, including many refugees, remain in detention, and the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices indicates that the conditions of detention of Palestinian prisoners have further deteriorated in recent years. The occupying forces continue to practices aggravated forms of torture in interrogating Palestinians, and their methods — such as violent shaking — which have sometimes resulted in death, are commonplace.

The Israeli authorities continue to pursue the policy of changing the demographic and geographical status of the occupied territories. According to the report of the Special Committee,

> "the increase in the number of settlers during the last four years was bigger than at any time in the past." (*A/51/99/Add.2, para. 830*)

The newly announced position of Israel on building new Jewish settlements and expanding the existing ones is a manifest indication of the Israeli determination to change the status quo of the occupied territories. In this context, they have also intensified the policy of demolishing houses in Jerusalem, and two months ago they decided to open an entrance to a tunnel in the close vicinity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, causing grave concern in the Islamic world in general and in the occupied territories in particular. The continued aggressive policies adopted and implemented by the occupying Power against the Islamic sacred places and the occupation of the city of Al-Quds, which enjoys the respect of all divine religions, must be condemned by the international community. All these measures are yet further indications that the Zionist regime is untrustworthy. It is a regime that cannot be trusted to fulfil its own undertakings — one that is following its own expansionist agenda.

In April the world witnessed, with much horror and indignation, Israeli aggression and terrorism against the people of Lebanon. For more than two weeks, the civilian and economic infrastructure of Lebanon were subjected to heavy bombardment, causing tremendous damage and inflicting many casualties on the civilian population, especially on women and children. In the course of these operations, United Nations peacekeeping facilities, which were used as a refugee shelter, did not escape the brutality of the aggressor. The main objective of the Israeli action was to instil fear and terror in Lebanon.

Such actions are indeed in line with the overall policies of Israel to dominate the region through, *inter alia*, the continued occupation of Palestine, southern Lebanon and the Golan Heights. The same policy is pursued through the enhancement of Israeli nuclear-weapon technology, which continues unchecked. Israeli nuclear-weapon facilities are detrimental to the entire Middle East region, and their existence threatens international peace and security. The refusal of Israel to adhere to internationally agreed treaties and put its nuclear facilities under the International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards regime creates an environment of uncertainty and insecurity in the region.

Such Israeli policies and practices, coupled with the non-realization of the legitimate rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people, are the main reasons for the bleak situation of the Middle East today. We believe that a comprehensive and just solution to the question of Palestine lies in full observation of all the rights of the people of Palestine, including the return of all Palestinian refugees to their own land and the liberation of all occupied territories.

In conclusion, while emphasizing our consistent and principled positions, we affirm our readiness to coordinate and cooperate with other peace-loving States, as well as with the relevant international organizations, for the realization of a real and genuine peace based on the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinians.

Mr. Elaraby (Egypt) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Since 1947, when the question of Palestine was first placed before the United Nations, Egypt has been exerting every possible effort to mobilize international support for the legitimate inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, particularly the right to self-determination and to an independent state on its homeland. The stages of the development of the question of Palestine are known to all. There is no doubt that the beginning of the peace process in Madrid five years ago marked a historic stage. Furthermore, the signing of the

Oslo accords in 1993 and the two agreements, in Cairo and Washington, in 1994, and other agreements with regard to the transfer of power, are all genuine additions to hope for the achievement of peace — a hope that is shared by all peoples of the region, particularly the Palestinian people.

The peace process was moving in the right direction — forwards — especially after the Oslo accords. Yes, the movement was sometimes rapid and at other times slower; however, the general movement of the peace process at the time was positive. This led all of us to believe that the question of Palestine was not far from a final settlement and that the Palestinian people was on the way to regaining its rights and establishing its state on its own land. However, this hope has begun to dim — indeed, it has been threatened with extinction ever since the end of last May when a new Government came to power in Israel.

Let me review with you some of the reasons which lead us in Egypt to realize how the peace process is now threatened. First, today's international community is based on the respect by States of their international commitments and pledges. Any jeopardizing of the principle of the sanctity of international agreements would revert this international community to the law of the jungle and to international chaos. In this context, Egypt notes Israel's failure to implement the deployment agreement regarding Hebron, although that agreement has official status. We note as well the new Israeli Government's attempt to renegotiate that agreement under the pretext that it is not committed to agreements entered into by the previous Government. This is an issue which has enjoyed a great deal of media attention. We would further note that, according to the provisions of the Israel-Palestine Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Israeli Government is also required, as of 7 September 1996, to redeploy its forces in area B and parts of C of the Palestinian occupied territories. This redeployment has not taken place.

Secondly, the Israeli Government has a most dangerous policy which strips the peace process of its substance. It is a policy of undertaking the building of new settlements in the occupied territories and intensifying settlement activities by expanding existing settlements — indeed, by confiscating Palestinian land. I should like to put the following facts before this Assembly. The policy of creating or expanding settlements in the occupied territories is a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. It also flagrantly contradicts the clear provisions in the Oslo accords pertaining to the parties needing to avoid any measures which would negatively affect the negotiations on the final status. Furthermore, such a policy is a clear violation of all the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, particularly Security Council resolutions 465 (1980) and 478 (1980) which make clear that such settlements are illegitimate. In addition, the creating of new settlements and the intensifying of settlement activities in the occupied territories strikes at the very core of the principle of land for peace, which together with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) provided the framework for the Madrid peace talks and the entire peace process. These tenets were freely accepted by all the parties to the talks, including Israel, as witnessed by the sponsors of the peace process and by the United Nations, as a representative of the entire international community.

Thirdly, related to this issue, I should like to recall that the peace process signed by Egypt and Israel in 1979 personifies the correct interpretation of Security Council resolution 242 (1967). Based on the principle of land for peace, Egypt regained all of its territory without any settler presence in return for maintaining completely peaceful relations with Israel. This fundamental principle must apply to all other Arab territories.

Fourthly, the Israeli Government's policy of confiscating Palestinian land and its policy of settlement expansion are clear and grave violations of the provisions of the Geneva conventions pertaining to the responsibilities of occupying forces. They are also flagrant violations of the principle of the non-acquisition of land by force.

Egypt, on many levels and more than once, has warned of the grave negative consequences of the policies of settlements and land confiscation. Egypt condemns such policies, the consequences of which have not and will not be recognized by the international community. Furthermore, we believe that these are illegitimate acts, which do not give any rights to land and concerning which no commitment can be imposed on the Palestinian negotiating side. Egypt calls on the international community, through this forum, to shoulder its responsibility to put an end to such measures, which complicate the negotiations and prejudge their results.

Further, since last February, Israel, on security pretexts that lack credibility, has on many occasions imposed an economic siege against the Palestinian people, both in the occupied territories and in the cities which have attained a measure of self-rule. In this way Israel has been strangling the newborn Palestinian economy.

Dozens of thousands of Palestinians are being denied any hope of an independent economy or a developing one. This is sure to create bitter feelings of frustration, which in turn will provide opportunities for the enemies of peace to demolish the peace process. The Israeli Government, in insisting on affronting the international community by opening a tunnel under the Al-Aqsa Mosque, is the only party to blame for the events of September 1996, including the bloody clashes which followed such a provocative measure.

All this brings to mind the spirit with which the Israeli Government deals with its partners in the peace process. The international community cannot expect such a spirit to lead to anything other than the current freeze in the peace process — and indeed, the possibility of a return to the vicious circle of violence and counter-violence. Egypt would recall here that the Israeli Government, continuing to flout the will of the international community, has yet to implement Security Council resolution 1073 (1996), which calls for the immediate cessation of all acts which led to the bloody clashes.

Fifthly, the peace process has taken commendable steps on the Palestinian track. The Palestinians have regained part of their land and their cities. There are irreversible new facts on the ground. However, the path to final settlement remains very long. Issues such as Jerusalem, the rights of Palestinian refugees, and others continue to await the parties at the negotiating table. The Israeli Government continues to ignore these issues, even though they came up six months ago. Egypt would like to reaffirm that negotiations are not — as some try to portray them — an objective *per se*; they are a process which must be positive, which must bear fruit so that people under occupation do not lose hope for peace and lose patience that their situation will improve.

Egypt believes in the role of the United Nations in supporting the peace process. Egypt fully supports — strongly supports — efforts by various organs and agencies of the United Nations to support the Palestinian people. I should like here to mention the important seminar held by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in Cairo, in May, on assistance to the Palestinian people. Egypt calls upon all States that pledged contributions in support of the efforts of the Palestinians to build their economy to respect those pledges. Without such contributions, living conditions will continue to deteriorate in the occupied territories, which would again facilitate the exploitation of the situation by the enemies of peace to obtain their objectives.

Egypt continues to make every effort to attain a just and comprehensive peace in the region and will shoulder its responsibilities. The international community has great hopes in the peace process; for 50 years now our region has not enjoyed peace. The Palestinian people looks with hope to the international community to regain its legitimate rights, and looks to the United Nations as a symbol of this international community. The Palestinian people calls for the support of its rights and of the basic principles of the peace process, as well as of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Egypt hopes that the Israeli Government will heed the appeals and messages being sent by the international community. It must cease those policies that destroy peace, policies it has been following daily. Its tactics of political prevarication and procrastination in implementing contractual responsibilities are no longer acceptable. If the Israeli Government cannot heed such appeals, if it cannot review its own policies, the United Nations, in particular the General Assembly and the Security Council, must shoulder their responsibilities under the Charter by taking measures to ensure that the situation in that vital region of the world does not continue to deteriorate.

Mr. Ngo Quang Xuan (Viet Nam): First of all, my delegation would like to join the international community in welcoming some positive developments on the Palestinian-Israeli track of the peace process that have taken place during the past year. Following the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements in September 1993 and the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in September 1995, important new progress has been achieved, including the redeployment of Israeli forces from major cities of the West Bank, the successful holding on 20 January 1996 of the first Palestinian general elections to the Legislative Council and the presidency of the Palestinian Authority, as well as the beginning, on 5 May 1996, of negotiations on the permanent status of the Palestinian territory. Furthermore, my delegation notes with satisfaction the relocation of the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees from Vienna to Gaza City, which has resulted in closer contact between the Agency and the Palestine refugees. In addition, my delegation welcomes the recent resumption of negotiations between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel, and has high hopes that this will open up an opportunity for a lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Apart from the limited achievements just mentioned, my delegation considers that the Middle East peace process has been challenged by a series of tragic incidents, including the resumption of settlement activities, land confiscation and the closure of the Palestinian territory. These have caused frustration and disappointment. In this regard, my delegation is of the view that the transitional period has reached a crucial stage which requires the full and effective implementation of the agreements reached and a speedy resumption of substantive negotiations on the basis of agreed principles and confidence-building measures.

The Government and people of Viet Nam have been following closely and with great interest the evolution of the peace process in the Middle East, and particularly the question of Palestine. In this regard, my delegation wishes to express its appreciation for the great work done over the year by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. The report of the Committee contained in document A/51/35, together with the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/51/678-S/1996/953, has informed us of a full range of activities carried out by the United Nations system for the promotion of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israel conflict. My delegation would also like to commend the Division for Palestinian Rights for its essential contribution as a centre for research, monitoring, the preparation of studies, and the collection and dissemination of information on all issues related to the question of Palestine.

In addition, as mentioned earlier in the Special Political and Decolonization Committee, my delegation cannot help but note the recent organization of a series of meetings and seminars concerning the question of Palestine. My delegation would like to commend the Cairo seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people held from 21 to 23 May 1996, the North American NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine held in New York from 24 to 26 June 1996, and the European NGO Symposium and International Meeting on the Question of Palestine held in Geneva from 2 to 4 September 1996. These meetings and seminars have, in our view, demonstrated the continued common concerns and commitments of the international community regarding the legitimate cause of the Palestinian people, with a view to helping it fully to realize its inalienable rights, particularly the right to self-determination and statehood.

My delegation is of the view that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached. Such a settlement must be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the withdrawal of Israel from Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, the principle of the exchange of land for peace, and the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, in particular the right to self-determination. In this regard, my delegation believes that the United Nations General Assembly can make a valuable and positive contribution to United Nations endeavours during the transitional period by continuing to promote dialogue and to educate and mobilize international opinion and action for the successful outcome of the agreements reached by the parties, in solidarity with the Palestinian people, until the final goal is achieved.

Before concluding, I would like once again to reaffirm Viet Nam's continued commitment to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East and to the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. In this regard, it is necessary to respect the basis upon which the process was initiated, namely, the principle of the return of land for peace and the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). It is equally important for the parties to comply with the agreements reached and to implement those agreements in good faith and without delay. It is essential that the international community intensify its efforts in support of the historic process of reconciliation between the two sides and to achieve the implementation of the agreements reached and the resumption of all aspects of the negotiations on the agreed basis.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): In accordance with General Assembly resolution 3369 (XXX) of 10 October 1975, I now call on the observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Mr. Ansay (Organization of the Islamic Conference): I thank the President for the opportunity to address the General Assembly once again during its present session. On behalf of the General Secretariat of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), I speak this afternoon on agenda item 35, "Question of Palestine".

We are all aware of the hopes and expectations with which the Middle East peace process was launched about five years ago. Our collective objective was to find a just

and comprehensive solution of the question of Palestine and the related conflict in the Middle East, the disastrous effects of which have left the lives and liberties of the Palestinian people shattered for almost half a century. Death, disablement, the destruction of homes, unemployment and violations of civil and human rights by the Israeli authorities have been that people's reward for wanting to live an independent, decent, hard-working and honourable life in its own land, under its own sovereignty and as a proud member of the international community of nations.

The peace process, which advanced a few steps with the signing of the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel and the Declaration of Principles in Washington D.C. on 28 September 1995, has regrettably returned to a state of virtual stalemate. What has brought about this all too familiar state of affairs is the sum of yet another series of violations of various elements of the peace agreements by Israel and the blatant and renewed acts of aggression by the Israeli authorities against the Palestinian people, especially following the installation of the new Government in Israel.

The Palestinians, for their part, while continuing to resist the acts of aggression by the Israeli authorities, as they must do, have demonstrated a remarkable capacity for shouldering whatever nation-building responsibilities have come their way through certain avenues of the peace process. The newly established Palestinian National Authority has confidently assumed its functions, and through that Authority the Palestinians have commenced the process of reconstruction and development. In these efforts, they are being assisted by the sympathetic and well-meaning members of the international community, comprising many friendly Governments and several intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The report of the Secretary-General (A/51/678) sheds some light on this aspect and states that

> "the United Nations will continue to support the peace process and to respond in an integrated way to the economic, social and other needs of the population in the West Bank and Gaza." *(A/51/678, para. 10)*

To that end, the helpful role played by the former United Nations Special Coordinator, Mr. Terje Roed Larsen, has not gone unnoticed, and I take this opportunity to express our appreciation of his work and of that of his colleagues in the funds, programmes and agencies of the United Nations who have collectively supported the development efforts of the Palestinian people under very difficult conditions. I should add, however, that the resources allocated to those tasks remain gravely short of the needs, and they urgently require strengthening.

We welcome the move of the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to Gaza City. We would like to convey to the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Mr. Peter Hansen, the assurances of our full support and cooperation in the important tasks his Agency is undertaking in Palestine as well as in the additional responsibilities he is at present shouldering in his dual capacity as United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories.

We know that pressures in both those areas are mounting, and given the reduction in resources and Israel's failure to cooperate, the fulfilment of those responsibilities cannot be easy. In fact, the much needed international humanitarian and technical assistance to the Palestinian people remains hindered by the apparent non-cooperative attitude of the Israeli authorities, who continue to enforce upon the population of today's Palestine the same restrictive bureaucratic formalities that they designed to deal with the people living under their military occupation in previous years.

In my statement in the General Assembly a year ago, I stated that experiences of this nature were, at best, at variance with and, at worst, in gross violation of the spirit of compromise and cooperation that must now characterize all current and future dealings between the Palestinian and Israeli authorities in the implementation of the peace agreements. This is all the more important now in order to establish the credibility and practicability of the peace accords already concluded and for generating confidence in the negotiations for future accords.

We in the OIC would very much like to believe that the difficulties I have just cited are perhaps only a neglected carry-over of the way the Palestinians were being dealt with before rather than the reflection of present-day official Israeli policies concerning the implementation of the peace accords. The signal here is that there is an urgent need for a change, and the time for that change is now. It will bring peace and the immeasurable benefits of peace to both the people of Palestine and the people of Israel if the peace accords are implemented by Israel with the same sincerity and vigour that the Palestinians are showing today.

I would now like to report briefly on the highlights of the OIC Annual Coordination Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs held here in New York on 2 October 1996, which reaffirmed the OIC's support for the peace process in the Middle East. It endorsed the Security Council's resolution 1073 (1996) on the serious deterioration of the situation in Al-Quds Al-Sharif (Jerusalem) and the other occupied Palestine territories.

The meeting called for the closure of the tunnel that Israel has constructed in the Al-Aqsa area, which has become the source of great controversy. It further called for establishing the authority of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) over all Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, as one geographical entity; for ensuring the transfer of all powers and responsibilities in all fields to the Palestinian National Authority; and for establishing Palestinian national institutions and realizing the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people, including its right to return, to self-determination, and to establish its own independent state on its national soil, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif (Jerusalem) as capital.

The meeting urged action to halt all measures, practices and decisions adopted by the Israeli occupation authorities in Jerusalem aimed at altering the City's geographic and demographic set-up and at violating Islamic and Christian holy places therein with a view to Judaizing the Holy City, and called for redoubling efforts to restore Arab Jerusalem to Palestinian sovereignty as the capital of the State of Palestine so as to ensure peace and security in the region.

It invited the international community, in particular the two sponsors of the Peace Conference and the States of the European Union, to compel Israel to cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan. It requested the Security Council to set up an international monitoring committee to prevent the establishment of settlements in the occupied Palestinian and Arab countries.

The meeting called for action within the United Nations and international institutions and forums to compel Israel to release detainees; return the deportees; halt the methods of mass punishment; cease the confiscation of lands and properties and the demolition of homes; and cease any actions that threaten life and the environment in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif. It urged the international community and the Security Council to compel Israel to comply with United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolution 487 (1981), to join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to implement the decisions of the International Atomic Energy Agency which call for subjecting all Israeli nuclear facilities to the Agency's system of comprehensive safeguards.

The meeting reaffirmed its support for the Middle East peace process and called for the implementation of all the agreements signed and commitments made between the parties in this context, especially the principle of land for peace and United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), which demand Israel's withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian Arab territories, including Jerusalem, the occupied Syrian Golan and the occupied Lebanese territory, the realization of the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people and the redeployment, forthwith, of the Israeli army from Hebron.

Last Friday we commemorated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People with a traditional meeting to mark the occasion here at the United Nations. A message from my Secretary-General, Mr. Hamid Algabid, was among those received from Heads of State and representatives of international organizations all over the world. It was a message of peace, a call for reason and an appeal for the extension of every support to the Palestinian people to help alleviate their sufferings after many years of occupation, repression and denial of the exercise of their national human rights. It is now up to the international community, the Member States represented in this body, to react and respond in the manner that the time and hour demand.

Our collective resolve to support the ongoing peace process must be maintained, for herein lies the opportunity for uniting efforts for the attainment of peace, tranquillity and progress for Palestine, Israel and all other countries in the Middle East and beyond that stand to gain immeasurably by the long-awaited positive turn of events in that troubled region. It is incumbent upon the membership of this great world Organization to ensure that in the few remaining years of the twentieth century, this opportunity is taken, and not lost.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

I shall now call on the representative of Israel, who wishes to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that, in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Peleg (Israel): Several previous speeches referred to General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947. As the meaning and context of this resolution were misrepresented, I would like to set the record straight.

Forty-nine years ago the General Assembly adopted a resolution in favour of the establishment of two States in British mandated territory of Palestine — the State of Israel and an Arab State. The Jews living under the British mandate accepted this resolution and established the State of Israel on 14 May 1948. The Palestinians, unfortunately, with the support of all the Arab countries, rejected the resolution and launched a war against the newly reborn State of Israel.

This fact is clearly recorded in the United Nations Palestine Commission's First Special Report to the Security Council of 16 February 1948:

> "Powerful Arab interests, both inside and outside Palestine, are defying the resolution of the General Assembly and are engaged in a deliberate effort to alter by force the settlement envisaged therein." (*A/AC.21/9, para. 3 (c)*)

The Representative of the Palestine Arab Higher Committee, in his statement to the Security Council on 23 April 1948, stated:

> "We have never concealed the fact that we began the fighting". (*Official Records of the Security Council, Third Year, No. 62, 287th meeting, p. 14*)

> "The Arabs did not want to submit to a truce which would have brought shame upon them, as they rather preferred to abandon their homes, their belongings, and everything they possessed in this world, and leave". (*Ibid.*)

When Israel's war of Independence ended a year later, some Palestinians became citizens of Israel, others became citizens of Jordan, some became subjects of Egypt and some became refugees in Arab countries. Israel's position is that any solution to the problem of refugees should include their integration into the countries in which they reside, as Israel did with the Jewish refugees from Arab States. This issue will be negotiated, together as other issues, as part of the final status negotiations between the two sides.

It is one of the ironies of history that 29 November has been selected as "Palestine Day" and the date of the traditional opening of the debate on the question of Palestine in the General Assembly, for it was the Palestinians who rejected the resolution adopted on 29 November 1947 and initiated, with the help of the Arab States, hostilities against the State of Israel. By doing so, they brought tragedy upon themselves and the region, imposing a great obstacle to the peaceful resolution of the conflict, and prolonged the search for a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Palestinians misrepresent the conflict by suggesting it began only in 1967, when Israel came into possession of the West Bank and Gaza following a war of self-defence. It must be remembered that the Palestinians, with the assistance of the Arab States, began an open war with Israel 19 years prior to that, in blatant violation of United Nations resolutions.

We hope that the lessons of the past were well learned and that we may now turn our energies towards building a brighter future.

I also hope that the words of the Palestinian representative who spoke in this debate do not reflect the position of the Palestinian leadership which signed the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements and the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, or of the Palestinian people who demonstrated their support for the peace process during the recent elections for the Palestinian National Council.

I trust that an agreement on Hebron will be reached soon, and I call again upon Chairman Arafat not to delay its signature any further. Peace will come only through direct negotiations without preconditions, free from external pressures.

Israel believes that issues related to the permanent status should be negotiated between the parties themselves and that the United Nations should not pre-determine the outcome of the talks. I concur completely with the position of the European Union, stated earlier today, that measures that prejudge the outcome of the permanent status negotiations must be avoided. Surely this should also refer to the draft resolutions before us.

The Acting President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: The Observer of Palestine has asked to be allowed to reply to a statement made by one of the speakers. I shall call on him on the basis of General Assembly resolutions 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974 and 43/177 of 15 December 1988.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) *(interpretation from Arabic)*: It is regrettable that the representative of Israel is continuing to insist on destroying what remains of the positive environment surrounding the situation in the Middle East and the peace process.

I should like to make some brief observations. First, as regards General Assembly resolution 181 (II), perhaps the representative of Israel has completely forgotten that that resolution called for the creation of a Jewish state and an Arab state. It also called for Jerusalem to be an independent international entity. The representative of Israel stated that Israel accepted the provisions of the resolution. It appears that he has also forgotten that less than two years later, Israel began to violate the provisions of resolution 181 (II) by declaring Jerusalem to be its capital. It set aside all the conditions laid down by the General Assembly for accepting Israel as a Member of the United Nations, including the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 181 (II) and 194 (III).

The situation of Palestinian refugees is one of the gravest refugee crises in the world; it is also one of the oldest. This tragic situation was created by Israeli terrorism. Defenceless people, faced with military oppression by armed gangs, fled their homes and their property; thus an entire people was uprooted from its homeland. Those refugees have inalienable rights, as provided for in resolution 194 (III) — the right to return to their homes, like any other refugees in the world; and the right, for those choosing not to return, to be compensated for their property.

The world is right to have chosen 29 November as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People because the goal of creating an independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital, still stands. Perhaps the time has come for Israel to realize that, from time to time, it must conform its positions to the will of the international community and not go against the current.

The Palestinian side is negotiating seriously in order to overcome the obstacle posed by Hebron and to implement the agreements already reached by both parties. We are insisting that these agreements be implemented without amendment, while the Israeli side, most regrettably, is insisting on reaching a new agreement. Many unacceptable demands are now being put forward.

Once again, the time has come for the Israeli side to abide by its agreed contractual commitments. It must put aside prevarication and procrastination as well as its tendency to blame the other side. There is a long list of Israeli tactics — very long indeed and very difficult to describe in such a short time. However, if the Israelis truly wish to achieve peace, the road is clear — the immediate implementation of all the provisions of the agreements already concluded, and the start of final status negotiations on the basis of the political and legal premises agreed on at Madrid.

Finally, any representative speaking in the General Assembly or in any of its Committees on behalf of Palestine is representing the Palestinian position in all its facets with the required seriousness.

We cannot under any circumstances accept any rude intervention in our internal affairs.

Mr. Peleg (Israel): Israel intends to continue, together with the Palestinians, the march towards peace until we reach our goal of a full peace between the two sides and a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

However, to refer to 29 November 1947 and resolution 181 (II) and to suggest that it was acceptable to the Palestinians is, I think, an attempt to rewrite history. I regret only that the Palestinians did not have this positive attitude towards peace with Israel in 1947, and that we have had to wait so many years to begin together with the Palestinians, the march towards peace. However, I have no doubt that we will achieve peace with the Palestinians, and I suggest that we all work together to that end.

The Acting President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I should like to inform members that the General Assembly will consider draft resolutions A/51/L.33, L.34, L.35 and L.36 on Wednesday, 4 December, in the morning.

The President took the Chair.

Programme of work

The President: I should like to recall that today is the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery.

As members are aware, the General Assembly, by its resolution 50/167 of 22 December 1995, decided, *inter alia*, to devote one meeting of the fifty-first session of the Assembly to the discussion of the problem of trafficking in human persons, especially women and children.

I should like to remind members that, as previously announced, the Assembly will hold a plenary meeting on Friday, 6 December, in the morning, devoted to the discussion of this question.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.

United Nations A/51/PV.70

General Assembly
Fifty-first Session

Official Records

70th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 3 December 1996, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Razali Ismail ..... (Malaysia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 33

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/51/543, A/51/678)

Draft resolutions (A/51/L.38, L.39, L.40)

The President: I call on the representative of Norway to introduce draft resolution A/51/L.40.

Mr. Biørn Lian (Norway): I have the honour to introduce, together with the Russian Federation and the United States of America, draft resolution A/51/L.40 on the Middle East peace process.

This draft resolution is a follow-up to General Assembly resolutions 48/58, 49/88 and 50/21. The draft resolution welcomes and gives full support to the achievements of the peace process so far and points to the need to proceed with negotiations with a view to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

These are difficult and trying times for the peace process in the Middle East. We all knew it would never be easy. The road to peace in the Middle East is less well-travelled than the road to war. Our late Foreign Minister, Johan Jorgen Holst, often remarked that the road to peace in the Middle East would be dangerous, politically difficult and subject to highway robbers and other spoilers of peace. His words were only too true. Yet the alternatives to peace are too ghastly to contemplate. We owe it to ourselves and to our children not to give in.

Time is not on our side. During the past year we have repeatedly seen how much damage small extremist groups on both sides can inflict on the peace process. The peace-seeking majorities on both sides must therefore come together in a common stand for peace. The implementation of the Interim Agreement is far behind schedule. We acknowledge that the new Israeli Government needed some time to put together a new negotiating team and we appreciate its commitment to respect existing agreements. Now, however, it is time to reinvigorate the negotiating process. The Israeli Government has a particular responsibility in this regard. We urge the Israelis and the Palestinians to do their utmost to settle the outstanding issues being discussed in relation to the Hebron Agreement.

Norway continues to be prepared to assist the parties in whatever way is considered useful. Through our chairmanship of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, we pursue our efforts to improve the economic basis for the new Palestinian Administration. We need the sustained cooperation and contribution of the international community to reach the ambitious aims that have been set in this regard.

Norway has also deployed civilian observers in Hebron as an advance team for a new temporary

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This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

international presence in that city. The objective of this presence is to maximize the opportunities for peace to take hold. In order to face the challenge of building trust and confidence between Israelis and Palestinians, we are also engaged in a people-to-people programme to promote Israeli-Palestinian cooperation in economic, cultural, educational, sports and other fields. This type of programme hopefully, can help to change stereotypical attitudes and calm existing fears as we move down the road to peace.

The debates and resolutions of the General Assembly should reflect the actual situation and the developments in the Middle East. Since the initiation of the peace process, we have witnessed overwhelmingly positive developments which few would have thought possible only a few years ago. At the same time, we know that many important issues remain to be solved. At present, the peace process is going through a difficult period. The draft resolution before us is a serious and, we believe, balanced attempt to reflect both the achievements and the fact that difficulties exist.

In its preambular part, the draft resolution contains an updating of developments and welcomes the declared commitment of the parties to overcome remaining difficulties and proceed with negotiations. The first three operative paragraphs welcome the peace process and express support for the achievements of the process thus far. In the three following paragraphs, the draft resolution urges the parties to fulfil their obligations and to implement the agreements already reached; calls for the immediate acceleration of negotiations on the agreed basis of the peace process; and stresses the need to achieve rapid progress on all tracks of the process. Operative paragraphs 7 and 8 call upon all Member States to extend economic, financial and technical assistance to the parties in the region and to render support for the peace process. Operative paragraph 9 points to the positive contribution that can be made by an active United Nations role in the peace process and in assisting in the implementation of the Declaration of Principles. The last paragraph encourages regional development and cooperation.

At this crucial juncture of the peace process, it is more necessary than ever before for this Assembly to give a clear and unequivocal expression of the support of the whole international community for the cause of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. We therefore recommend this draft resolution for unanimous adoption by the General Assembly.

The President: I now call on the representative of the Russian Federation, also to introduce draft resolution A/51/L.40.

Mr. Gorelik (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): The delegation of the Russian Federation, as a sponsor of the peace process in the Middle East, is honoured, together with the delegations of Norway and the United States of America, to introduce the draft resolution contained in document A/51/L.40.

The main thrust of this draft resolution is to consolidate the achievements made in the Middle East process and to urge the parties towards a prompt and good faith implementation of the agreements achieved. Meanwhile, the situation appears to be highly contradictory.

On the one hand, events of great political importance have taken place in the past year in the Middle East, especially on the Palestinian track: the first democratic elections, the election of the Palestinian National Authority, the formation of a self-government structure in the Gaza sector and the West Bank of the Jordan. Thus, a serious step has been taken towards the exercise of the national rights of the Palestinian people to their land, including their right to self-determination.

We believe that, from a historical perspective, a "critical mass" of peace, goodneighbourliness and cooperation is forming in the Middle East. The Madrid peace process, which Russia supports, is bringing the peoples of the area the tangible fruits of practical cooperation.

The real confirmation of this came at the Cairo Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit, which will give further momentum to the actions in the Middle East.

We must all support the ongoing movement towards peace, especially towards the restoration of the self-determination of the Palestinians. In this connection, draft resolution A/51/L.40 urges Member States to extend economic, financial and technical assistance to the Palestinians during the interim period. Russia also intends to help the economic rehabilitation of this area in every possible way through the measures mentioned in the draft resolution. Also of great importance is the provision in the draft resolution that an active role of the United Nations in the peace process in the Middle East and in assisting in the implementation of the Declaration of Principles can make a positive contribution.

We believe that the United Nations and its specialized agencies — especially the Office of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund — have great experience in implementing humanitarian and other programmes in the occupied territories. Their potential could be very useful in the process of implementing the Declaration of Principles.

Russia advocates the comprehensive and fair solution of all aspects of the conflict between the Arabs and the Israelis without detriment to either side. It was precisely on this formula that the Madrid peace process was constructed in the context of which is Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and the formula of the return of land for peace. It is our deep conviction that this is the international legal basis for the peace process in the Middle East.

However, the situation in the region today is alarming. We are concerned by the stalling of efforts to settle the Middle East problem. The uncertainty of the negotiating tracks has led to increased hostility and lack of trust between the two sides. Confrontation in Jerusalem, Ramallah, Nablus and Gaza are also on the increase.

Such a situation cannot continue. As our Minister declared in the Security Council on 27 September.

> "There must be a resumption of the peace process, not with a *tabula rasa*, but on the basis of compliance with agreements already entered into. Only those agreements — not just the written agreements; I must emphasize, but also those reached in the framework of the Madrid process — can ... put an end to the dangerous escalation of violence." (*S/PV.3698, p. 12*)

In this context, we not only welcome resumed contacts on the Palestinian track, but feel that this is a political and psychological test. If it fails, the comprehensive negotiations aimed at solving the remaining problems cannot succeed.

The instability in the Middle East will not end without progress on the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli negotiating tracks. That is why the draft resolution emphasizes the need for progress on all tracks. This can be achieved by all parties' fulfilling their obligations under agreements and arrangements previously entered into. This requires dialogue, goodwill, the good faith of all parties and the support of the international community.

We are therefore concerned at the continuing hiatus on the Syrian track.

The deadlock on the Lebanese-Israeli track, which has its own specific characteristics and international-legal basis for settlement, will be broken only when there is a general improvement in the atmosphere. As I have stated, fundamental in this regard is Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which provides for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, Israel's withdrawal from that country and the security of northern Israel.

We are convinced that the adoption of this balanced draft resolution will be a timely signal of support for efforts to establish a Middle East whose peoples and Governments can live in conditions of good-neighbourliness, broad international cooperation and crucial economic development. We attach great importance to the multilateral peace process, which is becoming more specific in nature, and believe that the United Nations and the Security Council will continue to play a constructive role in this respect. For our part, we intend to continue to act in our capacity as a sponsor of the Middle East peace process. We hope this draft resolution will be supported broadly by all States in the General Assembly.

The President: I now call on the representative of the United States of America, also to introduce draft resolution A/51/L.40.

Mr. Gnehm (United States): The United States is pleased to co-sponsor this year's General Assembly draft resolution on the Middle East peace process (A/51/L.40). Since 1993, the General Assembly has given its overwhelming approval to this resolution, which demonstrates the strong support of the United Nations and the international community for the peace process begun at Madrid. It is a message of support that underscores the positive role the United Nations has to play in the process and contributes to an atmosphere of reconciliation and cooperation that undergirds the efforts of the parties. That message remains relevant and timely.

This has not been an easy year for the peace process in the Middle East. There have been incidents of terrorism and outbreaks of violence. There have been misunderstandings and, indeed, periods of doubt. Progress has been slow. Extremist factions would like to believe that the momentum towards peace has stalled. We cannot accept that. The past is too filled with suffering; the opportunity for true reconciliation has been too long

in coming and the logic of peace remains too compelling to glide backwards now. Despite the challenges they face, the parties to the Madrid process have clearly stated their commitment to moving forward. The General Assembly should honour and endorse this commitment.

As we speak, Palestinians and Israelis remain hard at work negotiating the next important steps in their political journey together, including the issue of Hebron. I would like to take this opportunity to express our hope that Lebanon, Israel and Syria will also achieve progress in negotiations. In this regard, I should like to reaffirm my Government's commitment to Lebanon's political independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Those objectives were stated in Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which my Government supports.

The United States is proud once again to have worked closely with Russia and Norway in sponsoring this draft resolution. Its adoption will send a strong signal of support to the parties for their continued efforts, contribute to the momentum of the peace process and underscore the importance we all attach to building on the achievements and commitments that have been made by the parties to date. We invite the representatives of all States to join us in expressing support for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Peleg (Israel): For the better part of this decade, the peoples of the Middle East have been travelling on the road towards peace and a better future. The road has proven difficult, often pushing our commitment to peace to its breaking point. But the road to peace has also proven to be the only way to escape the cycle of violence and bloodshed that has gripped our region for nearly 50 years.

All of Israel stands united — united in our commitment to peace; united in our hope to achieve a historic reconciliation with our neighbours; united in our desire to create a better future for our children and our children's children. Israel's commitment to peace and to the peace process is unwavering, transcending all partisan lines.

Since the convening of the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991, Israel — indeed, the entire Middle East — has undergone a sea change. The Conference formula for both bilateral and multilateral negotiations between Israel and its neighbours has produced significant progress towards peace and cooperation. On 13 September 1993, Israel and the PLO signed the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, signifying our joint determination to transform decades of conflict into a new era of peace and cooperation. The process which began on that date represents the best, perhaps the only, opportunity the people of our region have for peaceful coexistence.

The subsequent agreements reached by Israel and the Palestinians — the Gaza-Jericho Agreement and the Interim Agreement — are forging a new reality in the Middle East. Another very significant event was the signing of the Treaty of Peace with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in October 1994.

Egypt was the first Arab country to make peace with Israel in 1979. Israel has always recognized the centrality of Egypt in the Arab world and in the Middle East as a whole. We trust that Egypt will use its regional and international standing to help further the peace process and to moderate the radical elements in the Arab world.

Since the establishment of peace with Jordan, our two countries have embarked on a series of joint ventures in such fields as agriculture, textiles and energy conservation. We hope that our relations with Jordan will serve as a model for future relations with all the States of our region.

Israel is also encouraged by its developing relations with North African States, such as Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritania, and with Oman and Qatar in the Persian Gulf region. The importance of those relations in helping us jointly confront the common challenges of our region cannot be underestimated. The existential and environmental problems which we face include the scarcity of resources, such as water, pervasive desertification, poverty and pollution. With the cooperation of all the countries of the region, we can cope with those problems and jointly meet the challenges of tomorrow. This will be to our own benefit and to the benefit of our future generations.

Regional cooperation against terrorism and its supporters received expression for the first time this year at the Summit of Peacemakers at Sharm el-Sheikh. President Clinton of the United States co-hosted the Summit with President Mubarak of Egypt. Leaders from Israel, Russia, Europe and many Arab and Muslim countries were also in attendance.

The Summit had three objectives: to enhance the peace process, to promote regional security and to

combat terror. In the Summit's final statement, the participants re-emphasized

> "their strong condemnation of all acts of terror..., including recent attacks in Israel, considering them alien to the moral and spiritual values shared by all peoples of the region". (*Journal of Palestine Studies XXV, No. 4, p. 137*)

The participants pledged:

> "to exert maximum efforts to identify and determine the source of financing for these groups and to cooperate in cutting them off". (*ibid.*)

We believe that the peace we are creating with our neighbours will translate into full regional cooperation. Two years ago a process of extensive regional economic cooperation began with the convening of the first Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit at Casablanca, under the auspices of His Majesty King Hassan II of Morocco. Last year, a second Summit was held at Amman under the auspices of His Majesty King Hussein of Jordan. Last month, a third summit was held at Cairo under the auspices of President Mubarak.

Two thousand participants came from 61 countries, including most of the countries of the Middle East and many Muslim countries from outside the region. The theme of the Summit, as stated in the Cairo Declaration, was "Building for the future: creating an investor-friendly environment". At the Summit, participants from Governments and the private sector reaffirmed their commitment to continue to work as partners for peace and prosperity in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Summit highlighted the region's economic, commercial and trade potential, as well as the reform programmes being undertaken by many of the States in the region, which will provide a more business-friendly economic climate throughout the region. Government representatives reaffirmed their commitment to establishing a bank for economic cooperation and development in the Middle East and North Africa at Cairo. Next year's economic summit will be held at Doha, Qatar.

Our efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace and greater regional cooperation will fall short without the participation of Syria and Lebanon. Syria, as a leader in the Arab world, with a rich cultural and historical past, has a major role to play in the further development of the region. We believe that our two countries can mutually benefit from the greater level of political and economic cooperation that normalization would bring about. I would like to reiterate here Israel's invitation to Syria, as a party to the Madrid Peace Conference framework, to resume negotiations with Israel without preconditions.

It is the hope of all Israeli citizens that the Yom Kippur war, in which Israel lost thousands of young men on the battle- field, will be our last war with Syria and that the Israel-Syria Disengagement Agreement, which has proven effective for over 20 years, will soon be supplanted by a full treaty of peace between our two countries.

Israel looks forward to the resumption of negotiations with Syria. Syria itself must decide if it wishes to promote peace or to perpetuate conflict. Recent messages emanating from Damascus have left unclear the answer to that question. In recent days, the Syrian Ambassador to Egypt and the Arab League, in a speech at the University of Alexandria, threatened Israel with the use of chemical weapons. The Ambassador's remarks were quoted in the Egyptian newspaper, *Al-Ahram*. That speech marks the first time that an official of Syria admitted to having in its possession a cache of chemical weapons that Syria plans to use against Israel. Those most disturbing comments directly contradict Syrian claims that Syria is committed to the peace process and to resolving the contentious issues between us through direct negotiations.

Make no mistake. Israel yearns for peace, but if attacked, we will defend ourselves as we have in the past.

As for Lebanon, it should be remembered that for years our border with Lebanon was the quietest of all of our frontiers. It used to be said that Lebanon would be the second Arab State to sign a peace treaty with Israel, waiting only for another State to take the first step. Unfortunately, since 1976, South Lebanon has been a base for attacks against Israel. Allow me to reiterate Israel's position: We have no territorial claims on Lebanon. The only issue that exists between us and Lebanon is the preservation of the security of both northern Israel and southern Lebanon. Only when Hezbollah terrorists are disarmed and the Lebanese Government extends its effective control to the international boundary will the hope of peace between our countries become a reality.

It is no secret that Syria enjoys substantial leverage over Lebanon and its policies and that thousands of Syrian troops are deployed in Lebanon. Likewise, it is clear that Hezbollah activities in southern Lebanon against Israel are completely dependent on Iranian financial and military support and on Syrian logistical support and that they would cease in the absence of that support. Syria can make an important contribution to the peace process by ensuring the cessation of Hezbollah's activities and by ending its cooperation with all international terrorist organizations operating from Syrian territory.

Syria and Lebanon need peace as much as Israel and the rest of the Middle East do. Peace will allow Syria and Israel to invest in people instead of weapons; in security instead of war; in economy and development instead of confrontation. There is no way to achieve this other than through direct negotiations at the decision-making level. That is how peace was achieved with Egypt and with Jordan and that is how understanding and agreements were achieved with the PLO.

The draft resolution on the Middle East peace process, which was introduced earlier and is sponsored by Norway, the Russian Federation and the United States, expresses the continuous support of the international community for the positive changes in the Middle East and, we hope, will be given the support of all United Nations Member States.

The United Nations has played an important role in providing economic assistance to the Palestinians through such agencies as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Israel welcomes and encourages this support and will continue to work closely with these organizations in implementing programmes aimed at the improvement of the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza. In addition, as a member of the group of international donor States, we will continue to contribute directly to the Palestinians.

A strong relationship exists between economic prosperity and political stability. Israel believes that the peace process will stand a greater chance of succeeding if the regional economic infrastructure is strengthened. Only in that way can we eliminate the poverty and despair that breed hatred, fanaticism and bloodshed. Peace is at hand. Let us work together to make it a reality.

Mr. Allagany (Saudi Arabia) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The Middle East is going through a period of transition. It is moving from a time of conflict and war into a new era, in which a just and universal peace is possible between the peoples of the region. This new stage will lay an additional burden on all the parties involved who wish to see prosperity and well-being for the peoples of the region. We should not believe that the peace process will continue automatically. The truth is that all the parties involved must give new momentum to the negotiations. We say this because the Middle East has over the past few months been going through a crisis that threatens completely to destroy the peace process, as a result of the hesitation and stalling of the Israeli Government with regard to the implementation of the basic peace agreements in which it does not believe. There is a danger that this will lead to practices that should have ended when the peace process began in Madrid.

The Arab response to the new policies of the Israeli Government was crystallized in the final communiqué of the Arab Summit, held in Cairo in June 1996. In that document, the Arab States reaffirmed their commitment to the continuation of the peace process in accordance with the principles agreed upon at the Madrid conference, and especially the principle of the return of land for peace, in conformity with resolutions of international legality.

We are deeply concerned about the decisions of the Israeli Government on the expansion of Israeli settlements and the establishment of new settlements on the West Bank, in occupied Arab Jerusalem, in the Gaza Strip and the Syrian Golan. We believe that the measures taken by the Israeli Government in that regard will only exacerbate tension in the area, encourage the cycle of violence and undermine the credibility of the Israeli Government with regard to the continuation of the peace process. They also threaten to destroy the peace process by completely undermining it.

We are especially concerned about the new guidelines adopted by the Israeli Government and the declarations made by the Prime Minister of Israel concerning the foundations of the peace process, in particular the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of the return of land for peace. The current situation is of concern to us, given the problems associated with the final status of Jerusalem, the settlements, the return of refugees and the re-establishment of Palestinian

sovereignty. Such guidelines and declarations are not in accordance with the agreed principles and link the implementation of the peace process to domestic problems that have recently emerged.

The redeployment of Israeli forces in Hebron has been delayed several times. This has encouraged the Israeli settlers to continue their provocative actions. This has aggravated tensions in the area, which have reached levels unprecedented in the city of Jerusalem. Moreover, there is no security at all in the journey between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. That is damaging to the integrity of Palestine as an indivisible territorial unit, as envisaged in the peace accords. This situation will only delay the exercise of authority and responsibility by the Palestinian Authority and will lead to worsening economic and living conditions in the occupied territories.

The accords between Palestine and Israel provide for the release of Palestinian prisoners as a measure to increase mutual confidence between the parties and as proof of goodwill. The United Nations has asked the Israeli authorities not to detain prisoners within the occupied territories, because this is a violation of the fourth Geneva Convention. The United Nations has asked Israel to respect that Convention, but the Israeli authorities have not complied with that request.

International reports indicate that the Israeli Cabinet decided on 2 August 1996 to lift the restrictions, which had been imposed by the previous Government in 1993, on the construction of settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. They began to streamline approval procedures by placing them under the responsibility of the Minister of Defence. It was also reported that the Israeli Government had pledged $5 million in aid to settlers, and that the present number of settlers on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip had increased by 45 per cent.

We believe that this settlement policy and these settlement efforts have created a menacing and serious situation, which is a threat to the Palestinian people and to the peace process itself. Moreover, they are incompatible with the Fourth Geneva Convention and with the provisions of the accords, which provide for the security and territorial integrity of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip during the transition period before the conclusion of the scheduled negotiations on the situation and the final status of the region.

At the beginning we welcomed the Palestinian-Israeli agreements that had been concluded so far. We thought that they could form a basis for the application of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements according to the agreed timetable. We thought that they would make it possible to strengthen the autonomy of Palestine and strengthen Palestine's political and economic foundations during the transitional period, while awaiting the restoration of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, in particular its rights to self-determination and to the creation of its own independent state within its own territory with, God willing, Jerusalem as the capital.

Jerusalem is an integral part of the Palestinian territory, which has been occupied by Israel since 1967, and in accordance with Security Council resolution 242 (1967) it must be given the same status as other Palestinian territories. The annexation of Jerusalem is not legitimate, neither are the measures taken by the Israeli Government to change the demographic composition and status of Jerusalem. None of this is legitimate. We recall once again Security Council resolution 478 (1980) concerning Jerusalem, in which the Council decides not to recognize the "basic law" on Jerusalem and calls upon Member States that have established diplomatic missions at Jerusalem to withdraw them. We ask Member States to respect and not contravene that resolution, and we note that it must be strictly applied so as to conform to international legitimacy, which is not incompatible with the Declaration of Principles.

Peace in the Middle East must include all aspects of the situation because the region is one indivisible whole. However, absolutely no progress has been made on the Syrian track. According to international reports, there has been a deterioration of the humanitarian situation for the Arabs in the Golan who are suffering from the repression and persecution of the occupying Israeli authorities. For example, the villages of Majdal Shams, Buq'ata, Mas'ada, Ain Kunya and Al-Fajr have been victims of the worst atrocities of unprecedented horror. Buildings have been destroyed, and fundamental freedoms and personal rights have been stifled. The occupying authorities are preventing members of the Arab population in the Golan from returning to their home country, the Syrian Arab Republic, or going to visit their relatives. This is not to mention the exorbitant taxes levied under very unfair provisions. There is a tax on housing and municipality taxes. There are deductions for national security and insurance. There are mandatory loans which absorb half of the income of those working in industry and trade. The Israeli authorities are also imposing taxes on everything an Arab human being in the

occupied Syrian Golan possesses and tightening the screws on the economy of the area, where the residents have no choice but to work for very low pay in road construction. And this is not to mention the Israeli Government's policy regarding settlement expansion and the confiscation of land, and the fact that refugees and deportees are compelled to live in very unjust conditions.

A just, peaceful and comprehensive resolution of the situation in the Middle East cannot be achieved without the complete withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Syrian Golan and without the dismantling of the settlements in accordance with the resolutions on international legitimacy regarding the Golan. As regards the Israel-Lebanese track, Security Council resolution 425 (1978) calls upon Israel to withdraw its forces — without any conditions — forthwith from all Lebanese territory.

No peace in the Middle East will be comprehensive or stable without there being a regional security system based on security arrangements that are fair, treat all the parties involved equally and keep armament levels to a minimum. This region must be free of all weapons of mass destruction: nuclear, chemical, biological and so forth. Our country believes that it is for the permanent members of the Security Council — who are the depositaries of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), and who sponsored the resolution on the Middle East submitted to the Review Conference and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons — to take steps so that the Middle East can become a nuclear-weapon-free zone. From this podium we call on Israel to resume the peace process in accordance with the accords, the arrangements agreed upon and the applicable principles. The objective must be a just peace and stability in the Middle East, despite the position of the new Israeli Government, which is not in favour of the peace process. A just peace embodying the aspirations of the people of the region must be sought, because it is intentions that are important, and the Arabs are determined to complete the peace process.

All the parties must respond to these good intentions for peace. We call on the two countries that sponsored the peace process in Madrid — the Russian Federation and the United States — together with the European Union to take effective measures to give new momentum to the peace process and to force Israel to comply with international law and with relevant international resolutions, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 252 (1968), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), as well as the principle of land for peace, so that the Middle East region can finally live in security and stability as it did in the past.

Mr. Amorim (Brazil): As a country in which ethnic and religious diversity has only contributed to enrich its culture, Brazil has repeatedly welcomed the major achievements witnessed in the situation in the Middle East in the last few years.

The convening of the Peace Conference in Madrid in October 1991, the signing of the Declaration of Principles in Washington in September 1993, the Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area in Cairo, in May 1994, the Agreement on the Preparatory Transfer of Powers and Responsibilities in August 1994, the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip of 28 September 1995, as well as the constitution of the Palestinian Authority — all these augured well for the future of the peace process in the region.

I also wish to stress the importance of the signing of the Agreement between Israel and Jordan on the Common Agenda in Washington in September 1993, the adoption of the Washington Declaration on 25 July 1994, and the signing of the Treaty of Peace on 26 October 1994, when I had the honour to be present myself.

In spite of these relevant developments, the peace process has witnessed some recent setbacks. The assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in October last year deeply shocked all those who support peace. The wave of suicide bomb attacks in Israel in February and March 1996 were also regrettable. More recently, the violent clashes in the West Bank and Gaza posed a new threat to the continuation of the dialogue in the region.

It is the earnest wish of the Brazilian Government that the parties involved in the peace process immediately resume the good track of dialogue and compromise, on the basis of agreements already reached. In this context, a fair and prompt solution to the questions related to the West Bank town of Hebron is essential. Furthermore, it is hoped that Syrian-Israeli negotiations will further contribute to the peace settlement. The Brazilian Government also reiterates its concern with regard to the situation in Lebanon and restates its firm commitment to the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon, within its internationally recognized boundaries, as stated in Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

Recalling the paramount importance of the bilateral talks mediated by some powers with legitimate interests in facilitating a comprehensive solution to the situation in the Middle East, the Brazilian delegation also pays tribute to the indisputable role the United Nations has been playing over the years in this field, not only by means of peacekeeping, but also through economic, social and humanitarian assistance. We commend the work done so far by the United Nations and recall its permanent responsibility with respect to the settlement of the issue. A word of acknowledgement is due to the highly significant role played by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

Mr. Mabilangan (Philippines), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The promotion of economic development in the West Bank and Gaza is indispensable to the full implementation of the Declaration of Principles. We strongly favour the strengthening of economic ties between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government as a sine qua non for the creation of a constructive environment in the area.

The participation of the international community in the economic side of the peace process is also essential. As a result of the Madrid Conference, a multilateral fund was established in 1993, under World Bank supervision, with a view to providing $1.2 billion to the Palestinian Authority. However, the donations so far made to the fund have been disappointingly scarce. We sincerely hope that these financial obligations will be met by the countries that have assumed responsibilities to this effect, in order to help the Palestinian Authority to face the serious challenges with which it has been confronted.

Brazil continues to follow very attentively the unfolding of events in the region and remains ready to extend its contribution to the peace efforts. In this spirit, my country hosted the United Nations Latin American and Caribbean Regional Seminar and NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine held from 20 to 23 March 1995 in Rio de Janeiro. Keenly aware of the importance of economic recovery as an integral part of the peace process, the Brazilian Government has actively participated in the Middle East-North Africa economic summits. We are also particularly supportive of technical and scientific cooperation programmes.

The Brazilian Government renews its strong support to the continuation of the negotiations which, we are convinced, will eventually lead to a fair, comprehensive and long-lasting negotiated solution to the situation in the Middle East, in accordance with the provisions of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). We are aware of the obstacles all sides involved in the process will have to overcome in order to consolidate peace, but we encourage all those genuinely interested in bringing about peace in that troubled area to persevere in their efforts to settle differences through dialogue and compromise.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): My delegation commends the efforts made by the Secretary-General in preparing comprehensive reports on the overall situation in the Middle East. These reports remind the international community how much work needs to be done to bring about a lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Since the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements in September 1993, followed by the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip in September 1995, the Middle East peace process has advanced with a mixed record. A few positive developments on the Palestinian-Israeli track of the peace process — in particular, redeployment of Israeli troops from major cities in the West Bank and the holding of general elections for the various positions of the Palestinian National Authority — generated some optimism.

Nonetheless, this mood was quickly overtaken by increasing frustration and anger over the retraction by the new Israeli Government on some crucial areas of negotiations. Similarly, no progress has been made on other tracks of the peace process. We are, rather, hearing ominous sounds that reinforce our fear of an eventual relapse into a situation of mistrust, tension and instability in the Middle East.

The politics in the Middle East revolve around the interlinking issues of ensuring self-determination, terminating all occupation, and restoring land rights and sovereignty over territories and resources. The question of Palestine remains at the crux of Middle East politics, and any progress — or lack of it — on this track of the peace process has its corresponding impact on all other tracks. In fact, the resolution of the question of Palestine holds the key to the achievement of a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The recent report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the

report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories have eloquently demonstrated the continued violation of the rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people. The refusal by the Israeli Government to honour and implement the terms of the peace agreements already agreed to sends an ominous signal. The attitude of the Israeli Government, which has replaced the agreed principle of land for peace with a security-for-peace formula on the Palestinian-Israeli track, has dealt a severe blow to the peace process. The unnecessary delay in the removal of Israeli troops from Hebron, under various security pretexts, only contributes further to widening the gap in trust between the Palestinians and the Israeli Government. It also raises serious doubts about the Israeli Government's motives and its commitment to the peace process. Nothing can justify the Israeli demand to divide the city of Hebron between a population of 120,000 Palestinians and 450 Israeli settlers, who are, for all practical purposes, outsiders. The international community has already raised its voice to reject that attitude, and has demanded that Israel withdraw its troops from Hebron without delay in order to facilitate the return of a climate of trust so that further progress may be made in other areas of the peace process.

It is regrettable that for the past 10 months Israel has continued to pursue with vigour a policy of blockade and collective punishment against the people of the occupied territories, with the ostensible purpose of demoralizing the Palestinian people. The restrictions imposed on the movement of people and goods within the Palestinian and Arab occupied territories and other areas, including Israel itself, have had a devastating effect on the economy and morale of the people in occupied Palestinian territory. Even more regrettable is the fact that Israel has refused to allow safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, infringing on the exercise of responsibility for self-rule by the Palestinian Authority. Interference in the affairs of the Palestinian Authority also violates the spirit of the peace agreements.

Israel's recent decision to resume the confiscation of land with a view to expanding the illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab lands has become yet another source of threat to the peace process. The recent high-profile visit to a settlement by the Israeli Prime Minister constitutes a provocation, an affront to the Palestinian people, which is likely to strengthen the forces that intend to derail the peace process. Israel is also taking steps to bring about demographic and geographical changes in Jerusalem, while continuing to refuse to discuss the question of the Holy City of Jerusalem. There is hardly any justification for the Israeli claim that it considers the question of Jerusalem to be non-negotiable. Under such circumstances, the prospect of the Palestinian people's realization of its right to self-determination, leading to the eventual establishment of an independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital, seems as elusive as ever.

The stalemate also continues with regard to the settlement of the Syrian Golan Heights, which has remained under Israeli occupation since the 1967 war. Not only has Israel pursued delaying tactics in the conduct of serious negotiations with Syria, within the framework of the Arab-Israeli peace process, it has also made repeated attempts to alter the demographic and legal character of this piece of the occupied territories, in contravention of all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions on this aspect of the question.

Bangladesh condemns any such attempt by Israel and joins others in calling upon Israel to desist from changing the demographic composition and legal status of the occupied Syrian Golan, including the establishment of new settlements and the imposition of its laws on the Syrian citizens in the occupied areas. We also call upon Israel to refrain from taking repressive measures against the Syrian population in the Golan area. We are pleased to be a sponsor of a draft resolution on this subject. We hope it will be adopted by consensus.

Lebanon is another victim of Israel aggression and illegal occupation. The people of southern Lebanon endure the hazardous consequences of the Israeli occupation almost every day. Israel continues to violate the territorial integrity and sovereignty of an independent nation by occupying a part of its territory in the name of security. Under Israeli occupation, the people of southern Lebanon continue to suffer regularly from harassment, arrest, torture, persecution and incarceration, accompanied by mass deportation, confiscation and the wanton destruction of lives and property. Bangladesh has consistently condemned the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon and the resultant violation of human rights there. We reiterate our call for the implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions relating to the complete and unconditional withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories in Lebanon. We believe that the people of Lebanon have the right to exercise their sovereign authority over their internationally recognized territory and that it is the solemn responsibility of every nation to respect that right.

Peace is a process of partnership, and it is an essential prerequisite for security. Through the signing of peace agreements, Israel has accepted the need to search for security and peace in partnership with its neighbours, including the Palestinian people. The withdrawal of Israeli troops from all occupied territories, the release of all Palestinian and Arab prisoners, allowing the Palestinian Authority to exercise control of its territories and resources, the immediate dismantling of settlements in occupied territories and the establishment of a cooperative relationship with its neighbours can create a solid foundation for pursuing a strategy of comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. We emphasize the importance of a more robust role for the United Nations in the peace process and continue to encourage efforts by the various agencies of the United Nations to assist the Palestinian and other Arab peoples under occupation.

We would like to take this opportunity to express Bangladesh's satisfaction at the recent signing of a memorandum of understanding that allows Iraq to export a limited amount of oil for the importation of food items. While Bangladesh steadfastly opposed the aggression against a neighbour that resulted in the imposition of sanctions against Iraq in 1990, we believe that Iraq's continued cooperation with the international community in fulfilling its obligations under various Security Council resolutions will facilitate the eventual withdrawal of United Nations sanctions against it. Bangladesh believes that sanctions must have their relevance and that they should be used in accordance with international laws and norms, in order not to create particular suffering for the vulnerable segments of society. Any unilateral, ill-considered and irrational decision on sanctions may only weaken the support for this important instrument of international punitive action.

Mr. Al-Awadhi (Yemen) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The Republic of Yemen, reaffirms its positive support for the peace process in the Middle East, beginning with the Peace Conference on the Middle East held in Madrid in October 1991, which provided for a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of commitment to and compliance with the provisions of legitimate international resolutions, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and subsequent agreements and protocols, and on the basis of the principle of land for peace and guarantees of a full Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories. Accordingly, the Republic of Yemen emphasizes the need for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace as the basis for security, stability and prosperity in the region so as to eliminate the causes of violence and extremism and instil a climate of tolerance, peaceful coexistence and cultural cooperation among the peoples.

However, we wish to express our concern at the resumption of the Israeli settlement policy in the Palestinian territories, especially around the Holy City of Al-Quds, the building of settlements, the demolition of Palestinian homes, the opening of by-pass roads for Israeli settlers, the continued blockade of Palestinian territories and the refusal to redeploy Israeli forces from Hebron. Such Israeli practices are a flagrant violation of the agreements concluded by Israel with the Palestinian Authority and can only exacerbate tensions and take the peace process back to its starting point. They could even wreck the whole process.

Hence, we emphasize the importance of making rapid progress towards a final settlement, which would ensure that the Palestinian people is granted its legitimate rights, especially its right to self-determination and to establish an independent state with Al-Quds as its capital, in accordance with relevant international resolutions and the basic principles of the Madrid Conference. For this, it is important that negotiations are held on all tracks on the basis of these principles and of respect by all parties for their obligations.

In this regard, the Republic of Yemen, while welcoming the agreement on the basic Declaration of Principles signed at Oslo between Israel and the Palestinian authorities, the related agreements and all the positive developments and steps made along the road to peace, wishes to emphasize that it also welcomes the agreement concluded between Jordan and Israel. We hope that it will be a step towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peace and a prelude to the full Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon. We call upon the United States sponsor and the Russian Federation to urge the new Israeli Government to resume the peace process, which had made considerable progress after the convening of the Madrid Conference and the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, so that the peoples of the region will not begin to lose hope — the hope that was rekindled during the period prior to the installation of the new Israeli Government in May 1996.

All that the international community together can call for as regards the peace process in the Middle East has already been called for in the final statements of the Summit of the Group of Seven Industrialized Countries

and Russia held in Lyon, the Arab Summit Conference in Cairo, the European Union summit in Florence and the African summit in Yaoundé. The importance of these summit conferences is underlined by the fact that they were held simultaneously at the end of June and the beginning of July this year, after the peace process deteriorated in the Middle East when the new Israeli Government came to office. It should be noted that there is a common element among the four statements issued by the summit conferences. They all emphasize the authoritativeness of the peace process and its foundations, especially the relevant Security Council resolutions and the principle of land for peace. Moreover, they urge the implementation of the agreements concluded in the context of the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians and the resumption of negotiations as soon as possible with the Palestinian Authority, Syria and Lebanon.

The emphasis by the summit statements on the basic principles underlying the peace process and the call for its resumption were a message to the parties concerned, especially the new Israeli Government, that it cannot circumvent those principles. The interests of the States concerned are too great to allow any single party to undermine the basis through a special programme that runs counter to the principles of international legitimacy, foremost among which are the inadmissibility of the acquisition of the territories of others by force, and the principle of land for peace. In this regard, my country welcomes the statements of the international summits calling on all parties concerned to honour their obligations immediately and without hesitation, which reassures us and gives us cause for satisfaction as to prospects for progress in the Middle East peace process.

A just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, together with the achievement of security and stability, can only be achieved through equal commitment on the part of all States of the region, and through the establishment of a zone free of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons in the region. We stress the need for Israel to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and for it to submit its nuclear facilities to the international inspection regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), as a first step towards establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East and ridding the area of the threat of all weapons of mass destruction. This is based on the belief that the security of States can be guaranteed through a peaceful settlement that respects the rights and interests of all parties and that the negotiations should be based on understandings in the scientific, cultural, social and economic fields and the principle of land for peace.

In this context, we express our satisfaction at the signing of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which was signed by Mr. Abdulkarim Al-Eryany, our Deputy Prime-Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, at this fifty-first session of the United Nations General Assembly. My country, will begin the procedure for the ratification of this Treaty very soon.

The peace process is currently facing risks and challenges that are preventing it from reaching its goals. Israel is dragging its feet and deliberately stalling on the question of resuming negotiations with the Syrian Arab Republic on the basis of agreements arrived at with the previous Israeli Government, foremost among which is the commitment to withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan and Southern Lebanon in accordance with relevant international resolutions and the principle of land for peace. We emphasize the need for Israel to respect the sovereignty and independence of fraternal Lebanon, release Lebanese detainees and prisoners from Israeli concentration camps, and compensate Lebanon for all the damage inflicted upon it as a result of the continuing Israeli acts of aggression against its territory and people.

In conclusion, I would like to express our hope that the international community will make concerted efforts to encourage the resumption of the peace process in the Middle East in order to achieve stability and international peace and security in the region.

Mr. Al-Awdi (Kuwait)(*interpretation from Arabic*): Allow me to speak on the situation in the Middle East, which is of great importance and of vital interest for the world.

Peace and security must be attained in the Middle East. The people in that region have suffered from the scourge of war and the lack of stability and peace. Wars have unfortunately damaged efforts for development and peace and have been replaced by a race to build up military arsenals with a view to inciting new wars. The principle of peace and security must reign in the region but it has become a chimera, having a negative impact on the peoples of the region and the world. The peoples of that region saw a promising sign in the initiation of the peace process in the Middle East at the 1991 Madrid Conference. The dream of lasting peace and security in the region seemed to be within reach, but there has been

a breakdown in that process for well-known reasons, namely the irresponsible practices of the new Israeli Government. It is no longer logic, dialogue and reason in the name of peace and stability that prevail in the region, but rather intransigence, procrastination and violence on the part of the Israeli Government, jeopardizing peace in the region.

Kuwait is pleased to note that the peace process has begun and that bilateral agreements have been signed between the Palestinian authorities and Israel as well as between the Israeli and Jordanian Governments in 1995. We wish to emphasize that progress must now be made on the Lebanese and Syrian fronts in order to ensure that the hopes of the peoples of the region can be realized, particularly on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). We are deeply concerned by the difficulties the peace process has encountered. In Kuwait we are aware of the inherent danger in Israel's persistence in implementing policies that impede peace in the region despite the agreements that have been reached with the Israeli authorities in the peace process. However, the economy of the territory has not changed and the occupying authority, Israel, is continuing its old practices, which are incompatible with international law and local custom, including unjustified detention, blockades, collective punishment and the expansion of existing settlements. A clear manifestation of these policies is the decision of the Israeli Government to expand the settlements to the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and elsewhere, flying in the face of international resolutions and the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

Kuwait followed Israeli's recent action in opening a tunnel on the west side of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Israeli policy is aimed at the provocation of Islamic feelings, the judaization of the area and the transformation of its Arab and Islamic character. Kuwait condemns these activities and reaffirms the necessity for Israel to cease such practices and safeguard the Arab and Islamic nature of the holy sites. The peace process is indispensable, and Kuwait considers that Israel must withdraw from the Golan Heights to show its good and peaceful intentions.

Kuwait supports the position of fraternal Syria, which is devoted to peace negotiations. Those negotiations came to a halt but the peace process must not come to an end until it achieves its final goal. We support our fraternal friends in Lebanon. Israel must implement all Security Council resolutions and withdraw from Lebanese territory without preconditions. We stand together with the Lebanese people in the hope that the region of peace and security can be ensured in the region. Just and lasting peace in the region implies that the Israeli people must respect the rights and laws of others and abide by the agreements that have been entered into, show good faith and act on the basis of an enlightened policy, without provoking others, in these endeavours to bring peace and security to the region.

We support the efforts of the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United States and call upon them to act quickly to preserve this push towards peace and ensure that the Israeli Government will respect international legality and the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), as well as the principle of land for peace.

In conclusion, let me affirm the unchanging position of the Kuwaiti Government to preserve peace and security in the Middle East. We are convinced that the required patience must be exercised in pursuing peace, for it will certainly have a positive impact on the peace-loving Arab peoples, who sincerely seek peace as a prerequisite for economic development and prosperity in the region.

Mr. Çelem (Turkey): For the last few months, we have been expressing our concern over the turn of events in the Middle East and the lack of progress in the peace process. With a direct interest in the realization of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, our sincere hope during these months has been that, after a time of change and uncertainty, the present impasse would prove to be a temporary one. We have been waiting for a breakthrough that would reinvigorate the peace process. Unfortunately, our hopes have not yet materialized, and our consternation continues to grow.

Turkey believes that unfulfilled obligations, terrorism and economic frustrations remain the three main obstacles hindering the peace process. In order for the process to pick up momentum, the parties must respect their commitments under the existing accords and avoid any action that may adversely affect these accords. If the negotiations on the redeployment of the Israeli forces in El Khalil — Hebron — reach a successful conclusion, this could be the breakthrough we have been waiting for.

Decisions regarding holy sites in particular have proved to be very ill-advised and damaging. In an area

where all three monotheistic religions should exist together in harmony, such divisive and insensitive actions must be avoided at all costs. In the same context, I cannot fail to mention the issue of settlements. The delicate balances created within the framework of the peace process should be preserved and respected.

If these crucial considerations are neglected, the peace effort in the Middle East may suffer serious setbacks. We cannot afford to see the already fragile peace process shattered. We believe that the legacy of all those who have paid for the cause of peace with their lives should help to nurture it. This undoubtedly requires the parties to exercise the utmost restraint and tolerance.

On the other hand, we believe that terrorism remains one of the fundamental threats to peace in the Middle East. Once again, we underline the urgent need for countries who lend their support to terrorism to end it immediately. We urge them to refrain from using this scourge of our times as a means of advancing their own foreign policy interests. We expect all countries to do their share in this regard at the bilateral, regional and international level. Recognizing the fact that the enemies of peace in our region do not hesitate to engage in violence in order to hamper reconciliation and stability, Turkey, for its part, stands ready to participate in enhanced cooperation to combat terrorism.

Another issue of concern for us is the economic and social situation in the region. The momentum achieved so far in the Middle East peace process needs to be quickly translated into better living conditions for the Palestinian people both within and outside the occupied territories. Once some level of prosperity and economic stability have been achieved, a spirit of cooperation can permanently replace the existing frustrations, which nurture destructive tendencies and intolerance. Given the current situation, the tangible support of the international community in the form of economic, financial and technical assistance to the Palestinian people is of paramount significance. At this stage, I should like to commend the signing of the Articles of Agreement of the Bank for Economic Cooperation and Development in the Middle East and North Africa. We are of the opinion that this bank will constitute one of the major cornerstones of stable and sustained development in our region.

I wish to take this opportunity to reiterate Turkey's commitment to help the peace process in every way possible and to contribute to the efforts aimed at achieving a viable reconciliation in the region. In this respect, we will continue our active participation in all five working groups in the multilateral tracks of the peace process.

As a country of the region, Turkey has always supported the just cause of the Palestinian people, and we are ready to contribute to all initiatives for a settlement based on United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

I would also like to reiterate my Government's stand on the situation in Lebanon. We attach great importance to the maintenance of the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of that country. We stress the significance of the full and strict implementation of the Taif Accords on National Reconciliation by all parties concerned, and we once again equally stress the need for implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

A just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East can only be based upon the rights of all States in the region, including Israel, to exist within secure and internationally recognized borders.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my Government's appeal to all parties concerned to make every effort to move the peace process forward in the right direction and to achieve the shining goal of true and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Al-Mualla (United Arab Emirates) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Fifty years have passed since the peace process began, but a just and comprehensive settlement has not taken place. We deplore the fact that the present Israeli Government, at a time when the Arab parties have reacted favourably to the peace process as a strategic choice for settling this problem, has rejected its commitments and has gone back on its obligations to which it agreed under the Madrid peace agreement, the relevant international resolutions and the principle of land for peace.

Regarding the Palestinian track, the Israeli Government, in addition to its violations, did not honour its obligations concerning the withdrawal from Hebron, the release of detainees and prisoners, and the need for a final solution. Israel has continued to confiscate lands and to establish settlements. It is desecrating the holy places of Islam and trying illegitimately to change the demographic composition and geographical status of Jerusalem before beginning negotiations on that city's final status.

Concerning the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, the Israeli Government is pursuing its stalling manoeuvres and delaying tactics, and continuing not to honour its commitments regarding the unconditional withdrawal from the occupied Golan and southern Lebanon. Similarly, Israel is stepping up its violence and military hegemony. This is a major impediment to the continuation of the peace negotiations. Israel has really lost its credibility. There are doubts now as to its statements and its intentions to continue the peace process.

My country believes that the settlements policy and judaization, which continue in the occupied Palestinian territories, the Golan and the West Bank, are a fait accompli as a result of repression and arbitrary acts, air attacks and recourse to control of southern Lebanon, Bekaa, and so on. All these practices are null and void, unlawful and a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention on human rights.

The continuation of these Israeli practices is incompatible with the peace process and the positive changes that have taken place on the international scene, and threatens to plunge the region into a new cycle of violence and deterioration of the tense situation, with unpredictable consequences for the entire world.

The objectives of strategic security, stability, cooperation and normalization in the region, to which Israel and the other countries of the region aspire, cannot be achieved if Israel does not respect its obligations concerning the imperatives of the peace settlement. This is an integral part of the orientation towards justice, peace, security and prosperity for all on an equal footing.

By adopting a flexible policy based on wisdom and aimed at regaining total sovereignty and achieving peace and stability for all Arab peoples, the Arab parties to the negotiations have on all occasions demonstrated how serious they are in their political will to achieve a just peace. But the present Israeli Government has misinterpreted that Arab position, and has broken away from the peace process. Recent Israeli practices, and statements made by the Prime Minister of Israel, illustrate Israel's defiance. The most recent of these statements was made this week, when he said he would continue the expansion of existing settlements and establishment of new ones, and that he would keep the West Bank forever.

Israeli practices could well plunge the region into a cycle of violence. Our country believes that we must find a just and comprehensive solution to the problem of the Middle East. We reaffirm our appeal. We believe that the Israeli party must give up anything and everything which prevents the continuation of the peace process in the region. This must be done in the following way.

First, there must be unconditional respect for all the legal commitments with respect to the withdrawal from Arab lands occupied since 1967. This is in accordance with internationally binding decisions, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). Israel must accept the principle of land for peace.

Secondly, the Israelis must immediately cease any and all activities of establishing settlements. They must dismantle everything which was constructed in violation of legal commitments, which would change the demographic composition of the area or which would damage Arab lands or Islamic holy places.

Thirdly, they must immediately withdraw from Hebron and cease all practices against the Palestinian people that are in violation of the arrangements agreed upon under the peace process. This must be done because the Palestinian people must be able to manage their own affairs and exercise their right to self-determination and to establish an independent State on its own territory and with its own capital.

Fourthly, serious negotiations must begin on a final settlement of the Palestinian question, the final status of the city of Jerusalem, the demarcation of boundaries and so on.

Fifthly, they must continue serious and unconditional negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks to ensure Israel's withdrawal from all Golan and southern Lebanese lands and the right of each and every State to security and national sovereignty over its respective territory.

In conclusion, we are in favour of the international policy of strengthening the role of the United Nations in the peace process at the present time, based on its political and historical responsibilities with respect to this matter, in order to build confidence and to insure support for a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East question, based on fairness and international legality.

Mr. Wisnumurti (Indonesia): In recent years, the international community has witnessed with great hope the seeds of peace being sown in the Middle East. Regrettably, however, it has become increasingly

apparent that some forces appear intent on not allowing these seeds to take root in the ancient soil of the Middle East.

We extensively debated for two days the question of Palestine, which remains the core issue of the situation in the Middle East. It has been our hope that progress on the Israeli-Palestinian track of negotiations — exemplified most recently by the redeployment of the Israeli army from major cities in the West Bank, the transfer of powers and responsibilities to the Palestinian Authority and the holding of Palestinian elections — would have positive spill-over effects on the other tracks of the negotiations.

That hope has not been without foundation. The progress in the Israeli-Palestinian talks has, after all, been mirrored in the transformation of the relations between Israel and Jordan, to the mutual benefit of their peoples. Yet progress on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks remained stubbornly slow. If progress o the Israeli-Palestinian track has proven not to be a panacea for the Israeli-Syrian and the Israeli-Lebanese paths of negotiations, it is not difficult to anticipate the significance of the recent aggression for Israeli-Palestinian relations.

During the debate on the question of Palestine, we heard speaker after speaker list a litany of commitments broken, of intransigence, procrastination and circumvention by the Government of Israel with respect to the implementation of the agreements already concluded, which have virtually extinguished the hopes to which the peace process gave rise.

The same manifest lack of commitment to the peace process on the part of the Government of Israel has unfortunately also been evident on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks of the negotiations. Indonesia remains convinced that peace will continue to elude the Middle East unless corresponding progress is achieved on these dimensions of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is therefore with a deep sense of regret that Indonesia notes the setbacks over the past year in the already scant progress on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks of negotiations.

In April of this year, Israel once again demonstrated its disregard of Security Council resolutions by launching massive land, sea and aerial attacks against Lebanon — a founding Member of the United Nations. The Israeli shelling of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) position in Qana, which resulted in more than 100 Lebanese refugees losing their lives and in casualties among UNIFIL personnel, is a tragic reminder of Israel's continuing pursuit of the logic of war. The violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon is totally unacceptable and we unreservedly support the demand for the complete and immediate withdrawal of all Israeli forces from southern Lebanon.

With regard to the Israeli-Syrian track of negotiations, we note with deep concern recent Israeli attempts to reinterpret or even discard the principles underlying those negotiations. Indonesia would like to reaffirm that a comprehensive and just settlement in the Middle East necessarily entails the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), the principle of land for peace and the return of all occupied Arab and Palestinian territories, including the Syrian Golan, Southern Lebanon and the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif. Otherwise, a comprehensive peace will remain elusive. The events of the past year are a potent reminder that much remains to be done before that goal is achieved.

Moreover, for peace to flourish in the Middle East, economic and social development are vital. The array of legal and political frameworks recently laid down in the various agreements already reached must be translated into a real improvement in the living conditions of the Palestinian people. Without it, the peace process remains fragile. Unfortunately, what we have witnessed instead is the closure of areas under Palestinian jurisdiction, including the borders of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with Jordan and Egypt, and the demolition of Palestinian homes and properties. Those policies are alien to the objectives of economic and social development in the Middle East. Therefore, it is clearly incumbent upon the international community to step up its efforts to mitigate the suffering of the Palestinian people. In addition, it must minimize political uncertainty, which is damaging to private-sector growth, by ensuring respect of the letter and spirit of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements and of subsequent agreements.

Indonesia firmly believes that the Middle East peace process must move forward and be rendered irreversible. The important accomplishments of the past few years should not be allowed to dissipate. Instead, the climate of distrust should be replaced by renewed faith in peace. To that end, it is essential that the international community put the peace process back on the right track to protest against a party that seems bent on aborting it.

The seeds of peace painstakingly sown over the past few years must be allowed to take root and flourish.

Ms. Lee (Singapore): Like many other Member countries of the United Nations, Singapore was gravely concerned at the violent confrontations that occurred in September this year in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, after Israel opened a second entrance to the Western Wall tunnel, near the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem's Old City.

Such clashes have put the Middle East peace process in jeopardy. Peace cannot be delayed any longer. Both sides must work together in a spirit of genuine compromise, based on a broad vision of what is best for their peoples and for the region. To act only on narrow, short-term political considerations would trigger another bloody cycle of violence. That would have great costs for both sides. The consequences would also leave their mark on the whole world.

The Assembly has just heard statements in the debate on agenda item 35, entitled "Question of Palestine". It is clear from that debate that the rights of the people of both Israel and Palestine are important. The Israel-Palestine conflict is at the core of the peace process. It is also at a very crucial stage. Much effort and cooperation is therefore required to avoid any further provocative actions that could lead to more violence.

Singapore continues to place the highest importance on the peace process. Unfortunately, its current status is not encouraging. Israel and Palestine, for the good of their peoples, must not forget their commitment to the peace process. Now more than ever, the people of Israel and Palestine need something greater than mere assurances, words or handshakes to give them hope for an end to hostilities in the region and for new momentum in the peace process.

Singapore therefore welcomed the news of the recent discussions between Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. Singapore hopes that those discussions will lead to the renewal and advancement of the peace negotiations. The fact that the peace process has come so far is in itself a remarkable achievement. Singapore expresses its continued support for the peace process and for prosperity and stability in the Middle East.

Mr. Mohammad (Brunei Darussalam): In the past few years the international community has been led to believe that the peace process will result in a just and lasting solution to the problems in the Middle East. The basis for peace laid out in the Madrid and Oslo peace accords made us optimistic that a comprehensive settlement of the problems in the Middle East could eventually be achieved. All the parties concerned have agreed to move forward along the path of peace. This was a welcome and hopeful sign of improved relations between the Arabs and the Israelis.

However, recent events have deeply frustrated those hopes. Sadly, we have been made aware that the road to peace is indeed still strewn with obstacles. The current Israeli leadership has so far not lived up to its commitments to the peace agreement signed with the Palestinians by their predecessors. Instead of expediting the withdrawal of its troops from Hebron, the Israeli leadership is trying to change the accords that have been agreed previously by both parties. Contrary to the spirit of the peace accords on Palestinian self-rule, the current leadership has also returned to the policy of increasing the Jewish settlements and demolishing more Palestinian homes in the occupied territories. Those acts constitute a serious violation of the peace agreement. We believe that in order for the peace process to move forward, the parties concerned must abide by the peace agreement already reached.

Israel's intransigent position with regard to the implementation of the peace agreements has meant that the Middle East peace process is now moving at a faltering pace. This has caused concern in the international community as to whether the parties involved will even reach the next stage of the peace process. We share these concerns and would like to encourage the parties involved to honour their commitments to a comprehensive peace settlement in the region. We would therefore like to see a resumption of Syrian-Israeli negotiations and wish to reaffirm our support for efforts to seek a complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Golan Heights. As for the settlement of the Lebanon issues, the Israelis have not moved out of southern Lebanon. Consequently, Brunei Darussalam urges all concerned, and interested parties, to reach an agreement leading to a full Israeli withdrawal from the buffer zone that it occupies.

Nevertheless, and in spite of negative signs, we believe that there is still hope for a comprehensive peace settlement in the region. We would, however, like to see the momentum for peace negotiations be sustained. In expressing our support for the peace process, we again encourage all parties to move in a committed, reasonable and positive manner and to honour their full obligations

on the basis of the peace accords in order to reach a just and comprehensive settlement.

It has always been our desire to see such a comprehensive settlement. In this respect, we wish to reaffirm our support for the peace process and our hope that progress will be made urgently towards achieving the goals defined in the various accords that led to the setting up of the process. We once again urge all parties to adhere fully the provisions agreed upon in Madrid and Oslo.

Mr. Wilmot (Ghana): For some months now, the Middle East peace process has appeared to be in a state of suspended animation, opening the way for widespread uneasiness and a feeling that a region that a year ago seemed headed for a lasting peace might be on a track back towards war.

When, at its previous session, the General Assembly reviewed the situation in the Middle East, it noted with satisfaction the many positive developments that had occurred in the peace process. It noted in particular the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the representative of the Palestinian people, in Washington in 1993 following the peace conference in Madrid in 1991 and its sequel in Oslo. It also noted the subsequent successive agreements between the two parties, culminating in the signing by them of the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip on 28 September 1995. The Assembly further noted with satisfaction the various accords between Israel and Jordan, which were crowned by the Treaty of Peace signed by these two countries on 26 October 1994.

All these developments were viewed as important steps towards achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which call for Israel's withdrawal from territories that it occupied during the 1967 war, and which also emphasize respect for the sovereignty of all States in that region and their right to live in peace within secure borders. The Assembly urged all parties to implement the agreements reached.

It was thus a matter of gratification to Ghana that, following these agreements, Israel withdrew its troops from the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area and began their redeployment in the rest of the West Bank. We were equally gratified when the Palestinian Authority was inaugurated in those areas and was able to conduct successfully the first Palestinian general elections in January this year, thus consolidating the assumption of administrative control by Palestinians over their own affairs. We also welcomed the adoption by the Palestine National Council, at its twenty-first session, of the resolution concerning the amendment of the National Charter. We saw all these as important steps and an additional impetus in the impending negotiations on the issues deferred to the final stage. Indeed these negotiations were formally launched in May 1996, raising hopes that concrete results would soon be achieved.

On the economic front, Ghana was pleased by the realization of the importance of the economic underpinnings of peace by the parties in the Middle East, encouraged in this regard by the results of the Conference to Support Middle East Peace convened in Washington in October 1993, including the establishment of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, and the subsequent work of the World Bank Consultative Group. We welcomed the decision by the Gulf Cooperation Council to lift its secondary and tertiary boycott against Israel, and the series of economic conferences convened by the countries of the region to exploit together their economic, commercial and trade potential. The latest of such conferences was the third Middle East/North African Economic Conference, held in Cairo in November 1996, which was aimed at facilitating private-sector investment and enhancing regional cooperation. We were happy to note that in all these endeavours Israel participated on an equal footing with its neighbours, a development that would have been unthinkable a few years ago.

It is against that background that my delegation expresses deep concern and anxiety over the recent outbreak of violence in the region, which has serious implications for the future of the peace process. The restrictions that the Israeli Government imposed on Palestinian workers from the West Bank and Gaza in reaction to the acts of violence have not only fuelled disillusionment with the peace process, but have also caused socio-economic hardship and insecurity that can only serve as a catalyst for extremists to incite negative sentiments against the process. The situation has unfortunately been aggravated further by the tragic events of September 1996 in Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The upshot of all this is the creation of an atmosphere of uncertainty about the future of the peace process.

Happily, both the Israeli Government and the PLO have recently reaffirmed their determination to carry on with the peace negotiations despite the numerous

setbacks. We appreciate this and encourage the parties to continue with the peace process. The alternative is a return to instability, sustained violence, regional tensions and uncertain economic prospects. Even a no-war, no-peace situation would not augur well for the region, as it would perpetuate tension and deprive the countries of the region of an opportunity jointly to exploit their enormous economic, commercial and trade potential for their mutual benefit.

We emphasize the need for all concerned parties to adhere to the provisions of the agreements already concluded and to take measures to implement these agreements in good faith, without delay and within the agreed time-frame, in accordance with the Declaration of Principles signed in Washington and all other agreements, until a permanent settlement is achieved on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). In particular, we call on the parties to resume the permanent status negotiations that were formally launched on 5 May 1996.

Ghana reaffirms its conviction that the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East will contribute significantly to the strengthening of international peace and security. But for this to occur, progress must be made on all tracks of the negotiations. In this regard, we applaud the progress made on the Israeli-Jordanian track, which has led to the normalization of relations between the two countries. We call on Israel and Syria to intensify their efforts to reach a common ground for speedy negotiations on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanon tracks. At this juncture, we wish to register our profound appreciation for the efforts being exerted by all other parties, particularly the sponsors of the peace process, during the bilateral and multilateral talks. We encourage them to persevere in their efforts to ensure the success of the peace process.

The role of the United Nations in the Middle East peace process remains important and must be strengthened and expanded. The United Nations should continue to provide the needed encouragement to the process, extending full support to the agreements concluded and to their timely implementation, and responding to the economic, social and other needs of the populations in the West Bank and Gaza. In this connection, we note with appreciation the valuable contribution of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories in coordinating the delivery of assistance to the Palestinians. We hope that the recent relocation from Vienna to Gaza City of the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) will enhance the quality and volume of assistance to the Palestinians. In this connection, we urge that UNRWA be given adequate resources to fulfil its role in the region.

Lastly, we call on the donor community, international organizations and investment institutions to provide the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction with adequate economic, financial and technical assistance in order to enable it to discharge its responsibilities towards the people of Palestine.

Mr. Campbell (Ireland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The following associated countries have aligned themselves with this statement: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. Iceland also aligns itself with this statement.

The peace process in the Middle East has been seriously hampered in the past year by a number of disturbing events and incidents. In February and March we witnessed the appalling terrorist attacks that took place in Ashkelon, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. These incidents were followed, in April, by the violent confrontation between Hezbollah and Israeli forces in Lebanon. The European Union deeply deplored the suffering inflicted on the civilian populations at that time and the terrible tragedy that occurred at Qana.

More recently, violence and rioting erupted in East Jerusalem and throughout the occupied territories following the opening by the Israeli authorities of the tunnel in the vicinity of the Temple Mount. There is no doubt that the peoples of the region are now profoundly frustrated by the deplorable increase in the level of violence, at the lack of progress in the peace process, and at the failure to implement in full agreements that are already in place.

On the other hand, we must also draw attention to a number of events that have evidenced a continuing commitment to the peace process and have served to strengthen it. The Palestinian elections in January bestowed a democratic legitimacy on the Palestinian Authority and confirmed the commitment of the Palestinian people and of their democratically elected leaders to continuing with the process. Other positive developments have included the Palestine National Council's undertaking to amend the Palestinian Charter

so as to recognize the right of the State of Israel to exist, and the resumption — after the violence that followed the tunnel incident — of direct talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

The European Union itself remains deeply committed to the peace process and reiterates that peace in the Middle East is a fundamental interest of the Union. With a view to promoting and assisting the process, the European Union has appointed Ambassador Moratinos of Spain as its special envoy to the peace process. We see his mission as complementing efforts already undertaken by the United States and others, and we are pleased with the positive response that his appointment has received in the region. We would point also to the frequent visits by representatives of the European Union to the Middle East as a further indication of our interest in securing a peaceful settlement. Most recently, from 9 to 11 November, the Troika of Foreign Ministers from Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands, together with the Vice-President of the European Commission, visited the region, meeting with a number of regional leaders in Damascus, Amman, Gaza and Cairo.

The European Union looks forward to the implementation of the already existing Palestinian-Israeli agreements, including the redeployment of Israeli security forces in and from Hebron and the release of Palestinian prisoners. The Union considers it important that other tracks of the peace process be simultaneously advanced and encouraged to bear fruit. We support the opening of negotiations between Israel and Lebanon while fully respecting the right of all States in the region to sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity. We have called repeatedly for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon and for cooperation with the United Nations forces serving there. It is time, we believe, that Lebanon should also enjoy the benefits of the peace process. The European Union likewise urges an early resumption of negotiations between Israel and Syria. We confirm also our support for the multilateral track, which we consider to be of importance in complementing and promoting the bilateral tracks. The European Union will continue to take an active part in the Regional Economic Development Working Group and in other groups in the multilateral track context.

The European Union considers economic and social progress to be an essential component of the peace process. For some years now, we have been the principal donor of aid to the West Bank and Gaza. In 1993 we announced, in respect of the latter, a five-year programme of assistance, which we are continuing to work to implement. The total sum of the European Community's budget contribution, together with member States' bilateral contributions, accounted for approximately 45 per cent of total donor contributions in 1995. At the ministerial Conference on Economic Assistance to the Palestinians in Paris last January, the European Union pledged a contribution of $120 million for 1996. In addition, the Union was one of the sponsors of the Middle East/North Africa Economic Conference, held in Cairo in November.

The European Union is convinced that the peace process is the only way forward in the Middle East and that there can be no alternative to it. It provides a unique and historic opportunity to achieve the type of peace settlement which the people of the Middle East so clearly desire and deserve. We believe that such a peace is indeed achievable. We urge all parties, accordingly, to work together in a positive spirit and participate in negotiations based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). The European Union will continue to do all in its power to encourage the parties to engage in dialogue and will intensify its efforts to achieve the comprehensive, just and lasting settlement to which all aspire.

Mr. Kamal (Pakistan): Over the last 50 years, the international community and the United Nations have made efforts to address the situation in the Middle East. The United Nations addressed the central issue of Palestine by recognizing the right to self-determination of the people of Palestine. A number of Security Council resolutions, including 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 425 (1978), provided the basic framework for resolving the problems in the region. Despite these efforts, the situation in the region remained precarious.

Five years ago, perhaps for the first time in modern history, the international community genuinely believed that peace would prevail in the Middle East; that a region which had suffered for so long from war and conflict would have a secure and stable future; that the people of Palestine would be allowed to exercise their right to self-determination, as recognized by the United Nations; that the question of Jerusalem would be resolved and the stateless Palestinians return home in safety and honour; that Israel would withdraw its troops from the occupied territories of Lebanon and Syria.

In October 1991, the Madrid Peace Conference paved the way for further negotiations between Arabs and Israelis. The conclusion of the two accords between

Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the signing of the Israeli-Jordanian Treaty of Peace and the two regional Economic Conferences were perceived as major developments in the ongoing process towards a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian problem. The initiation of final-status talks had also engendered optimism. We were hoping that, at the close of the century, the region would have achieved a durable peace. Unfortunately, some untoward developments over the last six months have dampened our optimism. The peace process has not only been stalled, but is in serious danger of being reversed.

The unwillingness of the new Israeli Government to honour the peace agreements signed by the previous Government and its decision to rule out any compromise on Jerusalem or a Palestinian State can fatally damage the peace process. Other decisions based on narrow practical considerations can nullify the gains made so far. These include the expansion of Jewish settlements on the occupied lands, efforts to keep the great majority of the West Bank under Israeli control and the decision to open a tunnel next to the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Palestinians continue to be subjected to torture and inhumane and degrading treatment. These policies of repression and violence will further reduce the chances of peaceful coexistence.

We must salvage the region from an atmosphere of conflict and war. It is obvious that, if the Middle East were allowed to plunge into a new, vicious cycle of violence and chaos, that would be a serious threat to international peace and security. We should therefore encourage the forces of moderation, dialogue and compromise.

At the core of the Middle East problem, as we all know, is the realization of the right to self-determination of the people of Palestine. In addition, other vital issues, such as the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with the Holy City of Jerusalem as its capital, and the return of approximately three and a half million Palestinian refugees to their homeland in safety and honour, must also be addressed in earnest.

It is incumbent upon the international community to persuade the Israeli Government to implement the agreements arrived at with such difficulty. The United Nations can augment these efforts. It can also take steps to ensure that problems in the region are resolved on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions. We believe that these United Nations resolutions continue to provide a viable and just framework for the realization of the right to self-determination of the people of Palestine.

Peace is the only solution to the problems of the Middle East and should be pursued sincerely and vigorously. The only alternative would be bloodshed and darkness and continued disappointment for a Palestinian people who have suffered so much already.

Mr. Sychou (Belarus) (*interpretation from Russian*): The Republic of Belarus attaches great importance to the solution of the conflict in the Middle East. We have attentively followed the development of the peace process in the region and welcomed the signing in September 1993 of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Agreements by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the subsequent implementation agreements, which testify to the genuine will of both sides to move towards the final goal of lasting peace and stability. Belarus views the conclusion of these agreements as important practical steps on the path towards a comprehensive settlement of the conflict in the Middle East and expresses the hope that they will contribute to progress in the final stage of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Noting with satisfaction the positive developments that have emerged since the Madrid Conference — the redeployment of Israeli forces from areas of the West Bank, the successful holding on 20 January 1996 of the first Palestinian elections to the Legislative Council and the election of PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat as President of the Palestinian Authority — the Republic of Belarus is also deeply concerned by the escalation of tensions in the region resulting from the activities of extremists, continuing acts of violence and the resumption of armed hostilities in territories under the control of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

It is our deep conviction that the vicious circle of violence and confrontation can be broken only around the negotiating table, where both sides should restrain themselves from any actions that could lead to the continuation of violence. The hopes and aspirations that the peoples of the region had begun to cherish since the signing of the Declaration of Principles three years ago should not give way to disappointment and desperation. We believe that, at this critical stage of the region's history, the dynamics of peaceful settlement must be maintained and the unconditional adherence of the parties to the provisions of previously concluded bilateral agreements ensured.

In this connection, the Republic of Belarus stresses the need for the speedy completion of the redeployment

of the Israeli troops in the West Bank, beginning with their withdrawal from Hebron. We note the readiness of the parties for dialogue during current negotiations on the subject at Erez and hope for a successful outcome to those talks.

Unfortunately, the progress achieved in the Middle East settlement in the past five years has been constantly darkened by casualties, particularly among the civilian population, as a result of the activities of terrorist groups aimed at undermining the achievement of the long-awaited dream of peace in this region. The cruel assassination of the Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Yitzhak Rabin, the series of terrorist acts early this year in Israel conducted by the Islamic extremist group, Hamas, and the explosion at the American facility in Saudi Arabia in June have tragically confirmed the need to step up the all-out battle against terrorism in the Middle East. The Summit of Peacemakers held on 13 March 1996 at Sharm El-Sheikh demonstrated the firm position of the world leaders, who strongly condemned terrorism and expressed their desire to contribute to the attainment of a comprehensive peace and regional stability. We are convinced that the international community must continue to support the efforts of the peacemakers to eliminate terrorism, whatever its motives and by whomever such barbaric acts of violence are committed.

Like other peace-loving nations, Belarus strongly denounces extremism and terrorism in all their manifestations. We understand the need to ensure the security of Israel in the face of internal and external terrorism. However, legitimate security interests should not interfere in the implementation of commitments undertaken with regard to the peaceful settlement of the conflict in the Middle East. We also believe that ensuring security and implementing measures to combat extremism and terrorism are the joint responsibility of both parties to the conflict.

It is perfectly obvious that genuine peace in the Middle East is impossible without significant progress on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks. The resumption of bilateral negotiations between Israel and Syria in late December last year is part of the dynamics of the peace process and must be maintained. We hope that the parties will be able to restart the dialogue as soon as possible on the basis of the principle of the return of land for peace, the gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces and the demilitarization of the Syrian Golan.

Belarus learned of the escalation of military hostilities in southern Lebanon in May and April of this year with deep concern. Our delegation calls upon all sides to adhere to the understanding of 26 April 1996, under which calm could be restored on the Lebanese-Israeli border. We consider that agreement to be a serious prerequisite for the resumption of peace negotiations between the parties, which should lead to the full restoration of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon on the basis of Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

It is common knowledge that economic growth and prosperity have a decisive role to play in creating a sound foundation for peace in every part of the world. This is particularly true in the Middle East. That region will continue to be a potential hotbed of tensions if there are no positive improvements in the living conditions of the Palestinians. We are concerned by the significant worsening of the state of the Palestinian economy, in particular as a result of the closure of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the eastern part of Jerusalem that was put into effect in response to the actions of suicidal fanatics in Israel early this year. Belarus expresses the hope that the declared readiness of the Israeli authorities to ease the imposed restrictions and contribute to the strengthening of the economic structure of the Palestinian territories will alleviate the current situation in the very near future.

The praiseworthy efforts of the donor States, the Bretton Woods institutions and other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations are also being directed to achieving that goal and we highly commend them.

The intensification of regional economic cooperation is also very important to efforts to establish lasting peace and is a crucial precondition for broadening mutually beneficial bilateral and multilateral cooperation. The third Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit, held last month in the capital of Egypt, was attended by delegations from over 70 countries and 50 international and regional organizations. It was a significant step in the development of economic ties between the Governments of the region and will deepen the dialogue aimed at the cooperative establishment of a stable future in the Middle East.

The recent initiative of Egypt, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Council, supported by the sponsors of the peace process, to establish a bank for economic cooperation and development for the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, including a forum for

regional economic cooperation, is also directed towards this end.

In conclusion, allow me once again to reaffirm the deep commitment of the Republic of Belarus to a comprehensive settlement of the conflict in the Middle East, which should be based on the land-for-peace formula spelled out in the United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and should envisage ensuring the rights of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders.

Mr. Zlenko (Ukraine): During the year that has passed since the consideration of this issue at the last session of the United Nations General Assembly, the process of the Middle East settlement has been characterized by ups and downs. An analysis of recent events indicates that, unfortunately, the Middle East peace process begun at Madrid and based on United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) has been hindered and has taken on a dangerous tendency to revert to the gloomy past.

The delegation of Ukraine maintains that the existing situation has been brought about primarily by the parties' deviation from previously undertaken commitments. If the parties continue to take such an approach, the peoples of the region will never reach the temple of agreement and peace. In this regard, Ukraine once again calls upon all parties to the conflict to remain steadily on the road outlined in Madrid in order to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Middle East conflict. That will constitute a significant contribution to the strengthening of international peace and security.

We hope that common sense will prevail in the political dialogue between Israel, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Syria and Lebanon and that all the parties will do their best to revitalize the negotiating process and give it a new impetus.

In this connection, as we see it, the important role belongs to the United Nations, whose contribution to the activities of the multilateral working groups on different aspects of the Middle East problem is in many respects the decisive factor.

In its position on the Middle East problem, Ukraine proceeds from the necessity to achieve a mutual compromise between all the parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict. We are also convinced that peace in the region can be established only through constructive dialogue on the basis of mutual respect and tolerance.

The results of the recent official visit of the President of Ukraine, Mr. Leonid Kuchma, to the State of Israel, in particular, his talks with the Prime Minister, Mr. Netanyahu — made it clear that our position was accepted with understanding and support. One more indicator of the balanced and consistent policy of Ukraine on the Middle East issue is the outcome of the meeting of the President of Ukraine with the President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mr. Yasser Arafat, on November 26, 1996, in Bethlehem. The Government of Ukraine plans a number of official visits to the Arab countries of the region — in particular to Lebanon, Syria and Egypt — the practical results of which, we hope, will make an important contribution to accelerating the peace process in the region. Ukraine, being a neutral party, could also be helpful in the achievement of this goal and we are ready to make the necessary efforts at both the bilateral and multilateral levels.

In our opinion, one of the most important aspects of the Middle East settlement is the fight against terrorism. The delegation of Ukraine is convinced that the barbarian and forcible methods used by the extremist groups with the aim of undermining peace efforts must be resolutely eradicated. It is inadmissible to let the provocative actions of fanatics slow down the achievement of the long-awaited peace in the Middle East. Our country unconditionally rejects terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Therefore, we welcome the convening of the Summit of Peacemakers at Sharm El Sheikh in Egypt, which has become the first important step in the fight against the spread of terrorism in the Middle East.

Ukraine was deeply concerned at the military operations in the eastern part of Lebanon that took place in April 1996 and caused casualties both among civilians and United Nations peacekeeping personnel, and prompted a severe humanitarian crisis. In this connection, we consider it appropriate to emphasize once again the need to adhere to the principles of the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of States, as well as to respect the right of each State in the region to a peaceful and safe existence within internationally recognized borders.

At the same time, any actions that gravely threaten the safety and security of United Nations peacekeeping personnel are absolutely unacceptable. The events in the south of Lebanon vividly proved that the elaboration and

adoption at the forty-ninth session of the General Assembly of the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel was a necessary and logical step. Therefore, we would like to take this opportunity once again to urge all States that have not yet done so to consider ratifying, accepting or acceding to the Convention in order to ensure its entry into force at the earliest possible date.

The situation in the region is also destabilized to a great extent by numerous regional conflicts. Ukraine believes that the long-standing territorial disputes between the United Arab Emirates and Iran, Yemen and Eritrea, as well as any similar disputes, should be solved only through peaceful bilateral negotiations or through the International Court of Justice.

We cannot but be concerned at the situation concerning Iraq. In this connection, we consider it necessary once again to emphasize the need to refrain from any further use of force to solve the problems in the region, to strictly adhere to the relevant resolutions on Iraq adopted by the Security Council, and to establish political dialogue between the Government of Iraq and Kurdish groups. In our opinion, any further deterioration in the situation around Iraq is extremely dangerous in the context of the Middle East settlement as a whole and may have unpredictable consequences. We are also concerned at the grave humanitarian crisis that is affecting the Iraqi population and we therefore urge members of the Security Council and the United Nations Secretary-General to make every effort to ensure the early introduction of the mechanism to implement Security Council resolution 986 (1995).

The 50-year history of the Middle East conflict brings to mind the words of the famous Roman historian, Livy, who once said:

> "Certain peace is better and safer than anticipated victory".

The fact that the conflicting parties have already understood this means that we can look to the future with a sense of cautious optimism.

Programme of work

The President: I should like to consult Member States concerning the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the operations of the United Nations Children's Fund. Representatives may recall that at its third plenary meeting on 20 September 1996, the General Assembly decided that the commemoration would take place on Wednesday, 11 December, in the morning. The United Nations Children's Fund has subsequently requested that it be held in the afternoon instead of the morning. If there is no objection, may I take it that the General Assembly agrees to the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the operations of the United Nations Children's Fund being held in the afternoon on Wednesday, 11 December?

I see no objection.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.